

DISCLAIMER: That part of this world and those characters you've seen before belong to their Creator: JKR. The rest is mine - although I cannot quit my day job as I make no \$\$\$

## INTRODUCTION:

This is rated M mostly to be safe and eventual violence. There is no (not yet, at least and even then, not as a plot point) graphic sex, although it will be suggestive. While I explore some themes again, this one intends to be more magical and less Muggle than the others... It is mostly H/Hr, although it is also H/Multi as well.

Saturday, March 13th, 1995

"Don't worry about it, Hermione," Ginny said as the two of them entered an unused corridor in the school. Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry had been around for a thousand years. It was in a castle, massive by any standards that, according to *Hogwarts: A History*, a book Hermione Granger practically had memorized, had been built and rebuilt numerous times. Had it not been a magical castle but a real one such as the Muggles had used in the Middle Ages, it could quartered several thousand soldiers with ease. As a magical school, however, it had fewer than 500 students and staff meaning there was a lot of unused and in many cases forgotten space such as this corridor.

"I really don't care what they write to me," Hermione huffed. "My concern is if they write my parents that rubbish." Hermione was complaining about the hate mail she had been receiving the past week following an article in the *Daily Prophet* by Rita Skeeter reporting that she was cheating on Harry Potter with Victor Krum. "What's even more upsetting is Victor's just a friend! He's engaged already and asked me to the Ball because I had no interest in him that way! I was his hostage because I am the only friend he has here! I've already written to his Katya to tell her the article was a pack of lies, but..."

"We know, Hermione," another voice said. Hermione looked and saw a blonde haired girl from her own year. It was Daphne Greengrass from Slytherin who, like several others, was now a part of a secret club, one that was meeting in full for the first time. "And I wouldn't worry too much about those people writing your parents

about that filth. The type of people who believe that stuff are also the types who wouldn't be caught dead communicating with Muggles."

"So where is this place?" Ginny asked.

"Just ahead," Hermione said. "Near as I can guess, this corridor hasn't been used in centuries. I warded the entrance to it so only we can find it and have similar wards on the door to the rooms."

"How...?" Daphne began.

"Rune based notice-me-not and forgetfulness wards," Hermione said. "It's..."

"Part of this year's Ancient Rune studies," Daphne nodded. "But how can we be keyed in? Professor Babbling hasn't taught much about keyed warding schemes yet."

"Those hairs I asked for," Hermione said. Daphne remembered the Society message asking for a strand of hair from each of them just a week ago. "I used it in a boundary potion tied into the wards. We can find this corridor. No one else can. I even checked Harry's unique map."

Hermione was really pleased she managed to convince Harry to get that map back from Professor Moody. The Professor had made the mistake of asking to borrow it which meant he was honor bond to give it back if asked. Harry had told her afterwards that the Professor had tried every trick in the book to get out of giving it back. He had said it was essential for security that he retained it what with the Tri-Wizard Tournament and Harry's strange participation. That was rubbish. Unless you knew who you were looking for - as in had memorized the names of everyone in the school - or if you were focusing on one location, the map was only useful for avoiding people, not finding them. If there were an intruder, you could find them, but that was mostly a case of accident as had been the case the previous year when Harry saw "Peter Pettigrew's" name on the map. The Professor then claimed it was a banned object, but that was a load of tosh too. It was not on the list posted outside Filch's office and therefore was not banned. Ultimately, the Professor gave up and returned the map - it was, after all a family heirloom which Hermione now knew meant unless it could be conclusively proven

that it was banned dark magic, the Professor had no choice but to give it back.

"This corridor is no longer on it," Hermione said. It was before I set the wards although there was an annotation good place to take a date for private time, but otherwise useless."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Ginny asked.

"It was Black's handwriting," Hermione said. "My guess is he brought girls down here for..."

"Oh."

"Here we are," Hermione said. She opened a door and the three entered a large hall of some sort. While it was much smaller than the Great Hall, it was larger than any of their classrooms. Unlike the corridor, which looked neglected, the room was clean and well lit. Along the opposite wall hung the banners of all four Houses. A circular table was in the center of the room, around which were eighteen chairs. Hermione, Daphne and Ginny were the first of the secret society to arrive.

In a way, this society began on October 31st. That was the day Harry Potter's name had been drawn from the Goblet of Fire and he became an involuntary participant in a life threatening tournament. Harry was only fourteen. There were supposed to be protections that prevented anyone under the age of seventeen to enter their names. Harry said he did not enter his name. Hermione believed him. She knew Harry wanted nothing to do with this silly tournament. She thought, given the reaction of both the teachers and most of the students that she was the only one who believed Harry. Their other friend Ron did not believe him until later, after Harry had nearly been killed by a dragon and, to be honest, Hermione doubted that Ron's change of opinion was genuine.

But it was soon clear to Hermione there were others out there who also believed that Harry was competing against his will and, like her, that there was far more going on here than any of the adults were saying, none of which was good for Harry. Moreover, each of these others also believed deep down that Harry was far more important to the future than anyone was saying, although none of them could say why. They all wanted to help Harry, but they all knew they had to go

through Hermione to do so. Hermione was a little upset that not one of them was a boy, for it made the others look like they wanted to offer a different kind of help. There was one boy out there who genuinely wanted to help Harry, but there were reasons he was not here tonight.

Ginny Weasley was the first to approach Hermione about Harry. It was the day after the Champions were announced. True, the brown eyed, red haired Weasley girl, first daughter in that line in generations, had had a crush on Harry her first year, but she was truly interested in another boy now, even if he hadn't noticed yet. She believed Harry would never do something so stupid and feared for his life. She considered Harry a friend and unofficial brother. Moreover, Harry had saved her life. The thirteen year old Gryffindor Third Year owed him and made it clear she would do anything to help Harry.

Katie Bell also approached her that first day in November. She was a Fifth Year in Gryffindor House with light brown hair and brown eyes. She was fifteen and one of the youngest girls in her year, but still had made starting Chaser of the Gryffindor House team the same year Harry started as Seeker. Hermione found that impressive as she was a Muggle Born witch as well and Hermione noted few Muggle Borns were any good on a broom, at least at that age. Katie refused to believe Harry wanted any part of the stupid tournament and hoped she could help find a way to get him out of it. She feared for her friend and teammate's safety.

The next day, three more girls approached Hermione about Harry. All three were surprises in their own way. Hermione was alone in the Library studying in a quiet corner when Parvati Patil asked to speak with her. Parvati was her roommate and while they were friendly, Hermione could not honestly say that they were friends. Parvati seemed to prefer talking non-stop about boys, clothes, make-up, Witch Weekly, divination and gossip with their other roommate Lavender Brown, whereas Hermione preferred to talk about books, classes and maybe Harry. Still, despite her giggling girl image, Hermione knew Parvati was very smart and observant. While Lavender had clearly joined the "Harry's a Cheat" camp, Parvati had not. She had not openly disagreed, but she confessed to Hermione that none of it made any sense. It was so out of character for Harry that Parvati was convinced someone was trying to kill their classmate. All other things considered, and Parvati believed that

Harry might well be the most important wizard alive, the boy did not deserve this and she wanted to help somehow.

As surprising as this was to Hermione, it was more surprising that Parvati still wanted to help a couple of months later following the Yule Ball. Harry had been her date and from Hermione's perspective, it had been a nightmare first date for her roommate. But that was not really Parvati's opinion. She told Hermione that Harry was actually a very good date for the most part, at least until he went over to see how Ron Weasley was getting along. Parvati was convinced Weasley must be part dementor. The red haired menace certainly could suck all the fun out of a room. The only fault Parvati found for Harry was sticking with the backstabbing git, an opinion Hermione quietly shared.

The other two girls who approached Hermione about Harry were a total surprise. Throughout the school, the two Fourth Years were known as the Untouchable Twins, although they were not related. They were both very pretty by any standard, one with long, black hair and grey eyes and the other a perfect figured blonde with blue eyes whom all the older boys (and at least one or two girls) drooled over. The two girls were considered among the most desirable girls in school, and yet they dated no one. (Neither would be at the Yule Ball about two months later). The Blonde was also known as the Ice Princess and had hexed more students than anyone else, all of whom were boys and most were from her own House. What was really shocking was that Tracy Davis and Daphne Greengrass were Slytherins, who were generally believed to hate Gryffindors on principal and hate Harry Potter in particular.

Hermione was naturally suspicious of the intentions of the Untouchable Twins, but after a long conversation, she began to see the two as both very Slytherin and very much not so. The Davis and Greengrass families had long ties to that house, and that was it. They were Purebloods, but not one had ever married another Slytherin. They arranged marriages with families on the Continent or sent their children off to jobs on the continent in the family businesses with the implied task of finding their spouse there. The few who had married British, married into the other houses, not Slytherin. Daphne said she would rather have been a Ravenclaw, but the damned hat would have none of it. That being said, she had no interest in Slytherin boys stating that is was not much of a step up from goats and sheep.

To these two, Harry was one of a very select few boys of any worth in the entire school. Hermione wasn't sure if they fancied her friend and wasn't sure if she would accept their help if they did. Both of them convinced her, however, that as attractive as Harry might be, he was far more important to the world than being listed as Britain's Most Eligible Wizard year after year. They believed three things about what had just happened. First, Harry was not the type of person most of the school thought he was and would never have tried to enter the tournament even if he was old enough. Second, someone else had tricked the Cup and worse, Dumbledore and the other so called adults turned a blind eye to that. Harry had been tricked into accepting a contract he had no reason to accept. This statement floored Hermione. All Harry had to do to get out of this was refuse to participate? He did, until Dumbledore told him it was too late, when it was not! Daphne and Tracey were convinced that whoever was involved (to include Dumbledore), things were set up in a way that was not in Harry's interest if he wished to live a long and healthy life. Finally, these two Slytherins saw Harry as important, but shackled. So long as others were calling the shots, Harry and the future were in danger. While Dumbledore might think he was helping Harry, letting Harry compete had caused the two Slytherins to rank Dumbledore just below Voldemort as the greatest risk to their collective futures. They needed to see Harry through this fiasco and then free him from his puppet masters so he could do whatever he was meant to do and not what old fools felt he should do. Hermione wondered what they meant at the time, but when they had both offered to swear an unbreakable vow of loyalty to Harry Potter, she accepted their help without requiring the vow. In the weeks and months that followed, she was grateful she had taken that leap of faith.

Over the next several weeks, as Harry went through that horrid First Task and the school got wrapped up in the coming Yule Ball and as Hermione spent hours with Harry helping him prepare for the tasks ahead, she also sat at a desk in the library meeting with girls from her growing organization. They unofficially called themselves The Harry Potter (Real Hogwarts Champion) Fan Club. It had grown over time. In addition to Tracey and Daphne, two other Slytherins had joined. There was a fifth year named Lucinda Urquhart who also happened to be a Prefect, which in and of itself was very useful. There was also a third year named Rosario (Rosie) Rosier, whose Uncle was a former Death Eater and whom her family had vowed to

kill on sight. These two ran with Daphne and Tracey, which meant they were outcasts in their own House, not that they cared. Slytherins tended to date Slytherins, and these four pointed out that there was little difference between sex with a Slytherin boy and bestiality. Ravenclaw was also represented. There was another Fifth Year named Laura Caldwell (a Muggle Born). Parvati's twin sister Padma was one of "them" now and remained such after the disaster that was letting Ron Weasley take her to the ball. Padma's roommate Lisa Turpin was also in the group as was an old friend of Ginny's, a Third Year named Luna Lovegood. Hermione found Luna to be a little strange but also absolutely honest. Hufflepuff contributed two more of Hermione's classmates: Hannah Abbot and Susan Bones. Both were from very old magical lines yet neither was a Pureblood. There were also two more Muggleborns. Marcia Robbins was a Fifth Year Prefect, giving this group more "cover" and there was also a Third Year named Andrea Lee.

They could not get Harry out of this mess, so the group decided to find out how he got into it and why. They also helped Hermione with spell research which she passed on to Harry. But the how and why led to more questions which led to more questions. Hermione coordinated the research they were doing. Until now, they always met with Hermione in ones or twos deep in the Library and, in fact, until this day most had no idea who the others in this group were. This idea came from the Slytherins who, to Hermione and the other's horror, revealed that Snape and Dumbledore were both accomplished in Legilimancy and used a passive form of it on students routinely. It was illegal, but damned near impossible to prove. All the girls began studying Occlumency and this meeting had been delayed until such time as they were all skilled enough at it to block passive attempts at reading their thoughts. Hermione wanted Harry to learn this as well, but it had to wait. He had to stay alive first.

Hermione took her seat at the table. While she was the leader in a sense by virtue of her close friendship with Harry Potter, there was no head seat at this round table. Each of the others sat down without regard to Houses or anything until only two seats remained. Hermione took the time to make sure everyone knew who everyone else was. The door to the room opened one last time and two young women in the blue robes of Beaubatons, the French magical school entered.

"Ladies," Hermione said as everyone eyed the striking blonde and pretty brunette who had entered, "these two have also been helping out since the Second Task and wish to join us. Miss Michelle Marcella is actually Italian and is in her Fourth Year and you may recall Miss Gabrielle Delacour? She was one of the hostages Harry rescued from the Black Lake."

"But that was just a girl!" Susan protested.

"I am part Veela, non?" the blonde said in a noticeable accent. "We develop different."

"She recently turned fourteen," Hermione added. "Her Veela heritage means two things. First, she entered puberty later than most. Second, she goes through puberty in a matter of days."

Gabrielle nodded. "It was not pleasant. I grew every way very fast. Maman says it hurts more than childbirth."

"And why are they here?" Hannah asked.

"I owe Harry a life debt," Gabrielle said.

"But Dumbledore said you were in no danger," Katie protested.

Gabrielle shrugged. "He is silly old man. I am part Veela. His magic could not save me from my heritage. Being in water like zat so long... It kills us even if we are under a spell. Had Harry not helped me when he did, I would be gone."

"And I wouldn't trust Dumbledore's word on that either," Daphne said. "We won't know if any of them would have lived had they not been saved."

"And the other one?" Ginny asked.

"She's my friend," Gabrielle replied.

"Just out of curiosity," Luna began, "your sister is Beaubatons Champion yet you're here to help Harry?"

"I love my sister," Gabrielle said, "but Harry saved my life. Fleur can be nice. But she can be full of herself too. Harry is not so."



"Have a seat," Hermione said.

The two new girls found their seats and sat down.

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Hermione stood and looked at the other seventeen young woman around the table. "Well," she said, "we're here, finally. We can now put all of our pieces together and see what we have. Hopefully, what we have will help Harry both now and in the future.

"I think we should begin with something that came to my attention last year. I didn't think much of it at all at the time, but this piece has proved invaluable the past few months in helping me know what we need to find out. Most of you had no idea why you were looking up what you were looking up and I have little idea what you've learned because of that mind probing nonsense. I want to thank Daphne for telling us about that and showing us how to keep the greasy and bearded ones out of our heads.

"Right then. About a year ago, as my classmates probably recall, I most publicly called a teacher a right old fraud and dropped her class. Needless to say, my roommate Parvati took issue with that, and that is where this begins. She showed me something that day that came back to me not long after Harry got trapped into this mess. Parvati?"

As Hermione sat, Parvati stood and placed a sheet of parchment face down on the table in front of her. As she did, everyone saw an image of the parchment appear in front of them.

## PROPHETIC CERTIFICATION

This is to Certify that Sibyl Patricia Trelawney did, on 28 June 1980, give a verified Prophecy evidencing her ability as Seer before a member of this Government. The Subject and Contents of said Prophecy are duly recorded in the Hall of Prophecy, Department of Mysteries, British Ministry of Magic, London.

I. TerrebonneRecorder of ProphecySeer Certification Board

"What's this?" someone asked.

"I got this from Professor Trelawney," Parvati said. "It was early in the year when she gave Lavender and me a copy after class. She knows people think she's a right fraud, but 'favors' a few students with this truth. This is a copy of her Seer Certification saying that she

has made a viable prophecy. For a Seer it's an important document to obtain as it gives you credibility, even if you only make one or two real predictions in your life."

"So she is a Seer?" Tracey asked.

Parvati nodded. "Not a great one. This is her only certificate that I know of. But she has at least a little of the true gift." Parvati sat down and removed the parchment and the image faded.

"That's so cool!" Andrea Lee commented.

"Ginny?" Hermione asked.

Ginny stood. She held another parchment in such a way that no one could see what was written on it yet.

"I actually got this almost two years ago," she said. "It was right after Harry got me out of the Chamber of Secrets. I was left in Dumbledore's office for quite a time by myself as he and the others were off doing whatever. I got bored and accioed this."

"A summoning Charm?" Daphne asked. "You were what – a First Year?"

"I also had Fred and George as older brothers. You either learn loads of magic early or become their prank tester. I could probably pass my Charms O.W.L.s today ... well at least the practical. Anyway, I accioed 'Earliest Reference To Harry Potter' just out of curiosity and this came to me. Should've thought of a copy charm, but I didn't. Funny. Dumbledore doesn't seem to miss it." She placed the document on the table as Parvati had.

The One with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches. Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies. And the Dark Lord will mark him as an equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not. And either must die at the hand of the other, for neither can live while the other survives.

S.P.T. to A.P.W.B.D.28 June 1980

"I had no idea what this meant at the time," Ginny said. "Of course, I was also a little out of it too having almost died and being afraid I was going to be expelled and sent to Azkaban for things I had no memory of doing. I had no idea what this had to do with Harry and figured I botched the spell or something. I mean, it doesn't say Harry Potter or anything like that. I got this end of First Year, so I had no idea about Divination and stuff. I actually had forgotten all about it until ... until Harry's name came out of that Cup and ... I don't know why I thought of this but I knew maybe Hermione might have an idea."

"That's when I remembered what Parvati had shown me last year," Hermione said. "I thought they might be connected and would've asked Parvati about it again even if she hadn't joined us. Notice the dates."

Parvati placed her parchment face down again and the two now appeared side by side.

"Same dates," Susan noted.

Hermione nodded. "I think this is a written copy of the Prophecy that Trelawney has been credited with."

"Ginny's right," Katie said. "It doesn't say anything about Harry."

"Not directly," Parvati replied.

"A lot of the research I had you all doing was in order to prove or disprove that this might have something to do with Harry," Hermione added.

"So what does this mean?" Lisa asked.

"The best way to do this is one sentence at a time," Lucinda Urquhart said. She noticed everyone looking at her. "I'm actually at the top of my year in Divination, although Trelawney hates me. She knows I think most of the stuff's rubbish. But I have developed an interest in prophecies and had been researching their interpretation. It's fascinating and not nearly as simple as it appears."

"Each sentence has meaning. But, we must pay particular attention to tense and case to determine what is the prediction, if there is one,

what are the preconditions for that to happen, and what are the limitations to the outcome. Looking at this, the part that seems most important as a starting point is the second clause of the second sentence."

"Why?" a few voices asked.

"It gives us a date certain," Lucinda replied. "It is present tense, meaning the seven month cycle that 'dies' was already occurring when the prophecy was made. The obvious question then is what was the starting point of the cycle? Again, the language of the clause tells us. Divination places a lot of emphasis on astrology and moon cycles, but uses certain terms to define them. A planet in a certain house, a month being full or new referring to the phase of the moon, waxing or waning referring to the moon again and Venus, all are tied to one kind of calendar ties to the stars and such. The verb 'dies' is not used as a description of an astrological cycle. 'Ends' would be clear, but it's the same thing. This is a regular calendar, not a moon cycle or some such. The Seventh Month is then July. This means the One referred to in the first sentence, who is obviously what this is all about, was born at the end of July 1980."

"Oooh!" Tracey said, "my turn! Okay... Third sentence we know the One is a boy, which explains one of my projects. Some of you may recall I was not at the Yule Ball. I spent the Hols at home. Well, there and the Ministry Records Office. I was asked to find out the names and birthdays of all wizards born in July of 1980 or any time thereafter. It was actually really easy 'cause there were only two. Harry Potter was born July 31st at 0143 and Neville Longbottom was born July 30th at 2339. This obviously is about Harry, right?"

"Not based upon birthdates," Lucinda said. "If this meant the last day, it would have said something like that. Technically, both were born as that month died. The qualifying statement that should differentiate between the two is the first clause of that sentence about parents who thrice defied this Dark Lord. It's vague. Could mean a lot of things. We'd have to know what the parents did during the War to know. You will note that the verb in that clause is past tense. That means whatever they did, it happened already before this prophecy was made."

Susan Bones stood and placed a document face down on the table in front of her. An image appeared before all the others. It was a

photograph of a young couple not much older than they were. At first glance, the boy looked like Harry Potter and the girl looked almost exactly like Ginny.

"Okay," Ginny said slowly. "I know that's not Harry and me. But it is creepy."

"James and Lily Potter," Susan said. "Or at least they would be. This picture was taken right about the time they finished Hogwarts in 1978. James Potter was the sole Heir Apparent of House Potter, one of the oldest magical lines around and he was a Pureblood. Although according to my Auntie, the Potters were not that type. His blood status was accident, not design as it is with certain families. Lily was a Muggle Born. They married later that summer just before entering training as Hit Wizards. It was the War and few were being trained as full on Aurors by this point. Training for combat only was faster than training an Auror and the Ministry needed combat capable wands. They completed training in May 1979 and were immediately thrown into battle. They were part of a Strike Team led by Professor Moody and they had three engagements with You-Know-Who and his minions. Those engagements were a success in that the Death Eaters took a beating. You-Know-Who escaped of course, but that could be the 'thrice defied' in the Prophecy."

"So it is Harry then," Katie sighed.

"Not if the 'thrice defied is the clue," Susan replied. She replaced the Potters with another photograph of another couple. "Frank and Alice Longbottom," Susan said. "They completed Hogwarts in 1974 and completed Auror training as part of the last class that finished the three year course before the end of the War. After completing training, they were assigned to a Team led by Gideon Prewett, at least until he was murdered in his home in 1980. They also battled You-Know-Who on three separate occasions all of which did not go well for the bad guys but, as usual, You-Know-Who ran away."

"Based upon that and ignoring the rest of it, it still could be either Harry Potter or Neville Longbottom," Lucinda said. "Which brings us to the next clause where You-Know-Who is supposed to mark the One as his equal."

"Obviously that means the scar," Ginny said.

"Prophecies are not about the obvious," Lucinda said. "If it were obvious, there would be no need for them. Marked does not necessarily mean a physical marking. Arguably, the Dark bastard has such a mark; the one he uses on his Death Eaters. No. Marked can mean acknowledge as an equal."

"The bastard has an unnatural interest in Harry," Hermione said. "Harry knows the bastard is up to something centering on him even as we speak, although he does not know what. He's already made two attempts against Harry since Harry started school."

"An obsession does not mean he sees Harry as his equal," Lucinda said. "What do we truly know about what happened all those years ago? We know his parents were killed. But what else? Aside from Harry, there were no witnesses and there was no way that Harry could have told what happened, is there?"

"Legilimency?" Luna suggested.

"Harry was only fifteen months old," Hermione said.

"Assuming someone would stoop to using that on an infant, it would only reveal what the infant understood," Lucinda said. "Our memories are limited to our ability to understand the world around us. For most of us, this means we have few memories from very young childhood and most are probably tied into pictures from that time. This is certainly true of memories that date to before we could talk. Talking and understanding speech provide us with context and that is the basis of most memories. Before we talked, our world was purely visual and our ability to understand things around us was limited. It is doubtful Harry had any memories of what happened that an adult could understand."

"So this Boy-Who-Lived thing?" Daphne asked.

"We know something happened that night," Lucinda offered. "We know You-Know-Who was somehow defeated. We know his followers came apart in the immediate aftermath and were rounded up fairly easily, if not completely. We know many of his most loyal followers claimed they were bewitched and bribed their way out of trials for their crimes. None of that would have happened had You-Know-Who survived that night. But, aside from the fact that Harry's

parents were dead, we don't know what really happened and it's doubtful we ever shall."

"So Harry never survived the Killing Curse?" Ginny asked.

"Can't say, can we?" Lucinda said. "There's no way to say for sure unless there was an eye witness. What makes that curse so nasty is not just that there is no magical defense, but that there is no magical signature. Most spells leave some trace, one that can be used against the caster in a trial. The Killing Curse leaves no magical signature. We can guess it was used because an otherwise healthy person is dead. But unless other spells were cast, we can't say for certain."

"So the scar?" Katie asked.

"Sometimes a scar is just a scar," Lucinda shrugged. "Even if it was caused by a faulty Killing Curse, I would argue that was not the 'mark' in the Prophecy. A better argument can be made that, assuming You-Know-Who went after Harry specifically that night, his targeting a fifteen month old child suggests he was concerned about the boy's potential. Also, as I understand it, You-Know-Who was alone when he attacked the Potters."

"How do you figure?" Susan asked.

"Had there been other Death Eaters there and regardless of what else happened, it's a fair bet one of his minions would have finished the job. Anyway, You-Know-Who seldom ever went out on his own. That may well be the only time he did. True, he may have figured the Potters were an easy target, but it does suggest a special interest in the boy. The attack itself marked Harry in many ways."

"For argument sake," Hermione said, "if we assume that this attack was the Mark, is it possible he also marked Neville? After all, aside from the Marking, the Prophecy could apply to both of them."

"He intended to deal with Neville as well, but he never got passed Harry," Hannah said. "After the Yule Ball, Susan and I went home for the balance of the Hols and, with the help of my Mum and Susan's Aunt, we got access to some recently unsealed Ministry files about the events of that Halloween."



"Recently unsealed?" Parvati asked.

Hannah nodded. "The stuff I went over were the transcripts from the trials of Bellatrix, Rastaban and Rodolfus LeStrange and Barty Crouch, Jr. It was ... enlightening. Those four were Death Eaters who are currently rotting in Azkaban, figuratively and literally seeing as Crouch is reported to have died there. Anyway, those four were tried for an attack on Neville's parents that occurred about a week after the attack on Harry and his family. It seems the two attacks were related.

"The best way to tell this is in chronological order," Hannah continued. "I went through all the testimony and came up with a timeline. In some ways the trial was unique as they did not just rely upon magical forensics and veritaserum as the Death Eaters raised questions that the Wizengamot wanted answered over the vociferous objections of the Chief Warlock."

"He wanted to suppress evidence?" Hermione asked.

"It would seem so," Hannah continued. "Okay, we know Trelawney made that Prophecy about a month before Harry and Neville were born. At the trial, the Prophecy itself was never revealed. But the Death Eaters testified that You-Know-Who learned that there was a Prophecy about his downfall and that it pointed to a boy who would be born at the end of July."

"How did he know?" Padma asked.

"Apparently Snape's a Death Eater," Hannah said. "He overheard at least part of it and reported it to You-Know-Who."

"Then what is he doing at Hogwarts?" Ginny asked.

"Dumbledore managed to convince the Wizengamot at that trial that Snape had turned spy and was supplying information to Dumbledore that helped take down several Death Eaters and thwarted several plots. Regardless, Snape did reveal what he learned to the enemy and Dumbledore knew it."

"How?" several voices asked.

"Snape was caught listening at the door," Hannah said. "He got away, but Dumbledore knew he had been there.

"Anyway, so You-Know-Who knew there was this Prophecy out there and suspected who might be the parents of the person who could defeat him. The problem was that no one then knew whether the Longbottoms or Potters were expecting a son or daughter. True, they may have known, but it was not public knowledge and You-Know-Who wanted to wait until he knew for certain which family needed to be eliminated.

"Both the Potters and Longbottoms were moved into houses under the Fidelius Charm on August 2nd, 1980, before the Birth Certificates were recorded at the Ministry and birth announcements published in the papers. Dumbledore cast both charms and initially Sirius Black was the Potters' Secret Keeper and Fabian Prewett was the Longbottoms'."

"Initially?" Daphne asked. "Are you saying they changed Secret Keepers?"

Hannah nodded.

"That means Black did not betray the Potters!"

"That is correct," Hannah said. "In late October 1981, Fabian Prewett was murdered by Death Eaters. According to the testimony, the murder was not related to his being Secret Keeper rather it was because he was a real pain in their arse. Only Moody's team was more effective at cutting into their ranks. Anyway, with Prewett's death, the Longbottoms needed a new Secret Keeper.

"Now here the testimony was a little confusing, for it was also decided for some reason that Black would no longer be the Potters' Secret Keeper. The accused had no idea about the decision to change. What we know of the change Dumbledore provided by way of explanation. However, the explanation makes little sense. Prewett and Black had been Secret Keepers for over a year and nothing suggests this was a risk. Dumbledore claimed he thought there was a spy in his ranks and had suspected as much for several months, but did not explain why he waited until Prewett's death to act. He recommended the replacements. For the Potters it would be Peter Pettigrew..."

"But everyone knows that Pettigrew is the one who fingered Black for the Potters' deaths!" Parvati said.

"That's what everyone was told," Hannah said. "But aside from Dumbledore, Black, Pettigrew and maybe the Potters no one knows what really happened do they? Anyway, according to Dumbledore Pettigrew became the Potters' Secret Keeper and Barty Crouch, Jr. became the new Secret Keeper for the Longbottoms."

"But he was one of the ones in the dock for the Longbottoms!" Parvati noted.

Hannah nodded. "Both Pettigrew and Crouch were Death Eaters. Dumbledore claimed he had no idea. He could not fathom Crouch being one given that his father was rabidly anti-Death Eater and he could not see Pettigrew being one either. At least that's what he claimed. Personally, I don't believe that rubbish; particularly because the day after the switch Voldemort attacked the Potters. To me it seems like Dumbledore set it up."

"Why would he do that?" Parvati asked.

"To see which one V-voldemort would go after," Hermione sighed. "Dumbledore knew the Prophecy and knew it meant either Harry or Neville, but also knew it meant nothing until Voldemort 'marked' one of them. Replacing reliable Secret Keepers with Death Eaters meant that Voldemort would get in. Dumbledore would then know who it was about."

"The problem with that theory is that You-Know-Who didn't intend to just attack the Potters," Hannah said. "The accused said the original plan was he would take care of both of them that night. Whatever happened at the Potters, it kept him from getting after the Longbottoms. But he had told some of his key people about the plan and Crouch and the others decided to do away with Longbottom and in hopes of finding out what the Longbottoms knew about what happened to their leader. Harry, by then, had already disappeared. Didn't go as planned. Neville wasn't at home when the Death Eaters attacked. His parents sent him to his Gran when they learned that the Potters had been betrayed."

"That means Black is innocent," Parvati said in shock.

"Certainly of betraying the Potters," Hannah agreed.

"He's innocent of all of it," Hermione said. "I've seen both him and Pettigrew – about a year ago to be exact. Pettigrew's an unregistered animagus. His form is a rat and I know Parvati has seen him."

"I have?"

"Ron Weasley's rat," Hermione said.

"That was Pettigrew?"

Hermione nodded. "We caught him about a year ago and he admitted to everything: betraying the Potters, being a Death Eater and killing all those Muggles."

"Why hasn't...?"

"The Minister refuses to believe any of that," Hermione sighed. "He'd look like an idiot, wouldn't he? Can't have that, now, can we?"

"Surely this came out in his trial?"

"There was no trial," Hermione said.

"WHAT?" several people asked.

"Sirius Black was never even charged, much less tried," Hannah explained. "Dumbledore said he was the Secret Keeper and that was the end of it."

"That makes no sense!" Daphne said. "Dumbledore recommended they switch to Pettigrew and later says Black was the Secret Keeper?"

"He claimed he was only aware that Crouch had been made one," Hannah said. "According to him, as far as he knew Black was still the Potters' Secret Keeper."

"He lied?" Parvati asked.

"So it would seem," Hannah said. "He also made sure the trial of the four who attacked the Longbottoms was sealed. He said the Prophecy had to be protected at all costs. It was easy enough considering they were under an Emergency Decree. There were only seven people who sat in on the trial: Crouch Sr. played judge, jury and executioner. Millicent Bagnold was there as was Dumbledore. Mad-eye Mooney was there as he was the one who caught the four. Some bloke named Deadelus Diggle was there as well. The other two have since died of natural causes."

"No trial and a secret trial?" Daphne commented.

"According to my Mum, most everyone there was in Dumbledore's pocket. For whatever reason, Dumbledore wanted the whole thing swept under the carpet and had the right people to make sure that's what happened. They used the rules regarding minors. As the case involved juvenile victims, they could seal it if the juvenile's magical guardian asked. At the time, Dumbledore was acting in that capacity for both Neville and Harry. Harry's only remaining relatives were Muggles and according to Dumbledore James and Lily never made a Will so he became Harry's by default. As for Neville, as his parents were not dead and no one had been appointed to act as guardian yet, he could act on Neville's behalf."

"A Galleon says there really was a Will and Dumbledore swept that under the carpet as well," Ginny growled.

"No bet," Susan said. Everyone looked at her. "The records of this trial were unsealed by my Auntie so we could look at them. Officially, if asked, she's taking another look at those events as Head of Magical Law Enforcement and in order to do so, she needed to unseal the transcripts. As both Harry and Neville are the last male Heirs of their lines, the transcripts could be unsealed at any time after they turned eleven at their request or by the Head of DMLE. That being said, there is a record that the Potters had a Will and it's on file at Gringotts. We don't know what it says, but a fair bet says Dumbledore wouldn't like it. Auntie guesses that Black was supposed to act as Executor and at the very least also as Harry's Magical Guardian, which she thinks is one of the reasons he was left to rot in Azkaban. Harry, of course, could have gotten his hands on the Will just by asking the Goblins anytime after he turned eleven."

"I don't think he's ever thought of that," Hermione said.

"Why would Dumbledore go to such lengths?" Tracey wondered aloud.

"He acts as though he is convinced Harry is the One in the Prophecy," Luna said. "His actions suggest he wanted to set it in motion to expose the One and he's set things up so he has almost exclusive control over the One."

Hermione nodded. "He sent Harry to live with his Muggle relatives. They are some of the most vile people you'll ever meet, and I include Death Eaters. For ten years, Harry slept in a closet. He was physically and emotionally abused and neglected and practically half starved to death. He didn't know his name or birthday until they had to send him off to primary school. Before he came to Hogwarts, in addition to never knowing anything about his parents, his heritage or magic, he never had a friend at all. He had no memory of a hug or kind word."

"He would therefore see our world as a sanctuary, a rescue," Luna agreed. "He would see Dumbledore as his savior and would trust the man to a fault."

"We all know he never wanted to be a part of this damned tournament," Hermione added, "but when Dumbledore said he had to be, Harry did not object. Harry has never once questioned Dumbledore about anything really. When told he has to return to his vile relations, Harry sucks it up believing whatever fairytale he's fed. Now that I think about it, I wonder why Dumbledore allowed us to help Sirius escape last year."

"Why do you say that?" Ginny asked.

"Because Sirius could take over, couldn't he?"

"He's still a fugitive," Daphne pointed out. "He can't show his face in our world without getting arrested or worse. So long as he is considered and escaped mass murderer, he can do very little to truly help Harry."

Hermione nodded. "Dumbledore didn't make much effort to convince the Minister any different. It makes sense in a sick way. By allowing us to help Sirius escape, he looks like he's on Harry's side. But by

not doing anything to truly help Sirius, he still has control over Harry and cannot be second guessed. All that pain just because he believes he's right about that stupid Prophecy!"

"And he can't even be sure of that," Lucinda said. "You-Know-Who intended on killing both Harry and Longbottom. Had he not been – well whatever – Longbottom would have been attacked as well. While the scar suggests the 'Mark,' we'd do well to remember that You-Know-Who was not distinguishing between the two that night. Harry became The-Boy-Who-Lived by a pure accident of sequencing. It is therefore entirely possible that the marking has not yet occurred."

"Unless you consider that Voldemort's been after Harry ever since," Hermione said. "He tried to kill Harry First and Second Year. Somehow, Harry can sense some of his thoughts and it seems he's after Harry again, although we don't know how other than this bloody Tournament."

"Possible, but by no means certain," Lucinda said. "Dumbledore and You-Know-Who clearly believe he is the One and as such he is in danger. But, to completely rule out Longbottom based upon what information we have is to be as foolish as those two. Dumbledore's actions suggests that, regardless of defeating You-Know-Who, he wants to control the child of the Prophecy for his own purposes."

"What if they're both wrong?" Katie asked. "What does Dumbledore stand to gain by controlling the One?"

"Dumbledore's been Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards since 1946," Daphne said. "He became Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot in 1948 and Headmaster of Hogwarts in 1954. He might have become Headmaster anyway, but given his family, ordinarily he would never have achieved his other positions. While the Dumbledores have a hereditary seat, they are not wealthy at all. They were not top drawer and it had been those at the top of society who filled those posts. But, after defeating Grindelwald in 1945 and ending that Wizards' War..." Daphne shrugged. "He's been asked to become Minister for Magic as well on several occasions. Then again, as Chief Warlock he controls the courts, the legislative agenda and the appointment and removal of the Minister for Magic. For all practical purposes, he's nearly a

dictator although Daddy says he's cunning enough not to abuse that position too often or too obviously.

"But, he's also yesterday's news. Most of the people who put him in power have died and he's older than most of the people currently on the Wizengamot and such. There are already people who think it's time for a change. The reason this have not happened yet is because Dumbledore has been adept at keeping the Wizengamot divided so there's no coalition with enough votes to ask him to step down. He's been playing one side against the other since the War supporting progressive legislation on Muggle Baiting and Muggle Born rights – although he's also been soft on enforcement – while also supporting restrictions on werewolves and such. The lycan laws have few detractors but also keep the Pureblood Supremacists and their ilk happy.

"What would happen if someone new came along with similar political capital? What if You-Know-Who returned and some young man thumped him for good? Dumbledore would be out in a week! By controlling the One, at the very least if the One is successful, Dumbledore can claim a lion's share of the credit, keeping himself in charge of everything."

"He's doing far more than controlling," Hermione huffed. "Whether it's Harry or Neville, what is he doing to help the One? Nothing really. Harry may know more magic than most his age, but that's no thanks to Dumbledore. The only teacher who taught him anything outside the standard materials was Professor Lupin. And if Neville is the one? He's passing. That's it!"

"That's also saying something about Neville," Ginny said.

"Oh?" a few voices asked.

"Neville's told me. He's using his father's old wand and it's not a match for him at all."

"But Ron was using Charlie's at first," Hermione began.

"And the wand reacted to him," Ginny said. "Maybe not as well as a true match, but there was a magical reaction. Neville's never did that."



"Then how...?" Hannah asked.

"Despite appearances, it seems that Neville is a very powerful wizard in his own right," Lucinda said. "If he's passing classes with an unmatched wand, it means he's all but doing it wandlessly! If he had a matched wand..."

"And then there's Harry," Hermione said. "Mastered the Patronus Charm last year and drove off almost a hundred dementors with it. Snape said only a really powerful wizard could have done that!"

"Yeah, like Merlin," Tracey said. "I don't think anyone alive today could do that."

"So," Hermione said, "what we have potentially are two very powerful wizards who each – er – earned a personal visit from Voldemort as babies, although he never quite got around to Neville. We have a Prophecy that could mean either of them at this point, am I right?"

"Mostly," Lucinda said. "No Prophecy is accurate as stated. It requires people to act on the information to move it to fruition. The preconditions point to either of them. Obviously, if Longbottom's passing with a dud wand, it might well be either of them fit the bill at first. Subsequent events point towards Harry. While what happened in '81 was inconclusive, what happened since points smack at him. Still...having two wickedly powerful wizards is always better than only one."

"What's the rest of the Prophecy suggest?" Susan asked.

"No idea what the power the Dark Lord knows not could be," Lucinda replied. "It could mean some kind of magical ability or other source of knowledge, or another kind of ability altogether. It could also simply mean magical power. Each magical person has a maximum magical potential, one they don't reach until they grow up and even then only if they work at it. You-Know-Who was quite powerful by all accounts, although there are suggestions his vast knowledge of magic was at least as much of his magical power as his raw ability. Perhaps the One is so much more powerful magically speaking that knowledge and skill cannot overcome the difference?"

"Dumbledore told Harry that love was the power," Hermione said. "Not in the context of the Prophecy, mind you. It was back First Year after Harry had killed Quirrell. Harry couldn't explain how that happened and Dumbledore told him it was the love sacrifice of this mother and the love he is capable of. He said Voldemort does not consider love of any importance but that's what did it."

"So, Harry just has to love the Dark Wanker to death?" Katie asked. "I'm pretty sure he doesn't swing that way, Hermione."

"And it like he's been getting loads of it in life," Ginny added. "His relatives..."

"Have shown him only hate," Hermione agreed. "He had a chance last year when Sirius showed up and it looked like Sirius might be vindicated. That lasted all of an hour! It seems as if every chance he's had to learn about that has been snatched away! AND DUMBLEDORE...!"

"Harry's a nice guy," Parvati said, "but really closed up tight that way. I didn't expect much from him at the Ball, but probably more than he showed. He wouldn't open up at all."

"You would think if love is this power it would have been encouraged, not suppressed!" Hermione said.

"Unless we go back to the notion that Dumbledore wants the One controlled," Daphne added. "Everything that has happened to Harry Dumbledore could have either prevented or at least helped him with, right?"

Hermione and others nodded.

"And yet the man does worse than nothing! If Harry is the One, he should be getting ready for it, not being held back at all. I stand by my statement. I think Dumbledore considers Harry some kind of threat and is doing everything possible to keep Harry down!"

"And that means hell for us all," Lucinda said. "The rest of the Prophecy is clear enough. Only the One can defeat this Dark Lord and only the Dark Lord can defeat the One. One must kill the other. There's no way around that bit. And he who wins, wins all. But until that happens, we have a stalemate of sorts. The dark wizards

cannot win nor lose and the same is true for the other side. But both sides will be quite capable of harming the rest of us. Whether it's Harry or Neville, we must bring the One into his own. The longer we wait, the more likely You-Know-Who will return and if that happens, lots of people are going to die."

"This has gone way beyond Harry and this stupid Tournament," Lisa said.

"Complaining?" Susan asked.

"Just making an observation," Lisa replied. "If anything, this tournament is now much ado about nothing in a way."

"Except it's connected somehow," Luna added. "A small piece of the puzzle, but it's a piece none the less. Whether or not Harry is the One, the fact remains he is important in the end and right now he's in danger."

"We need to get him and Neville prepared," Ginny added. "Lucinda's right in that we don't know for certain who the One is based upon that thing. Harry's got the target on his back for now. But what if it is Neville? No one's doing anything for him either."

"Fair bet Dumbledore has his hands in that as well," Tracy agreed. "We need to find a way to get the Old Man out of the picture. So long as he's playing, it's his game."

"Not much we can do here at school," Daphne said.

"Aside from helping him survive this nonsense," Marcia Robbins said speaking for the first time. "Which we're already doing through Hermione."

"But what about this summer?" Daphne added.

"Dumbledore insists he has to go back to those vile relatives," Hermione said.

"Legally speaking, what Harry does on his Hols is none of that man's concern," Susan said. "He may be acting as Harry's magical guardian, but he does not have legal custody of the lad and from

what Hermione's told me I doubt Harry's relations would lose any sleep if Harry spent his summer somewhere else."

"He's spent time at the Weasleys," Hermione began.

"And that brings up other problems," Ginny said.

"Oh?"

Saturday, March 13th, 1995

Ginny placed a piece of parchment face down in front of her and an image appeared before the rest in the room.

## BETROTHAL CONTRACT

WHEREAS Arthur Percival Weasley and Molly Ellen Weasley nee Prewett are both lawfully wed and the natural parents of their daughter Genevra Molly Weasley having all rights and privileges to her by law and custom; and

WHEREAS Albus Pervical Wolfric Brian Dumbledore, by law and custom in the absence of a probated Will or other documentation executed heretofor by James Charles Potter and/or Lily Marie Potter nee Evans, both now deceased and formerly natural parents of Harry James Potter, is aforesaid Harry James Potter's Legal and Magical Guardian empowered to act on his behalf; and

WHEREAS it is deemed in the best interest of the aforesaid Genevra Molly Weasley and Harry James Potter that they should one day be bound as wife to husband;

THEREFORE, it is hereby agreed as follows:

Albus Pervical Wolfric Brian Dumbledore, as legal Guardian of the Minor Bridegroom shall deliver unto House Weasley a Dowry to be paid out in 1,000 Galleon per annum installments commencing 90 days after execution of this Agreement and continuing until Minor Bridegroom attains his sixteenth Birthday. In addition, all costs associated with the education of all lawful children of Arthur Percival and Molly Ellen Weasley shall be covered from this date until all such children attain their N.E.W.T.s without exception.

Within 30 days after Minor Bridegroom attains age sixteen, Minor Bridegroom and Minor Bride shall be wed.

The parties agree to the use of such Potions as necessary should either minor prove reluctant in regards to accepting the other as lawfully wedded spouse, promptly consummating aforesaid marriage and bearing a child of such union not more than twelve (12) months after marriage.

Upon the marriage of the aforesaid minors pursuant to the terms of this agreement, Albus Pervical Wolfric Brian Dumbledore, as legal Guardian of the Minor Bridegroom shall deliver unto House Weasley further Dowry of 10,000 Galleons.

Upon birth of the child of the aforesaid union, a further and complete Dowry of 50,000 Galleons shall be delivered.

Breach of the terms of this Agreement by the undersigned or by either of the aforesaid Minors shall incur such penalties as allowed by law.

Entered into this 1st day of December, 1981.

It was signed by Mr. and Mrs. Weasley and Dumbledore.

A stunned silence fell over the room for a moment.

"Is ... is this real?" Katie asked.

"Unfortunately," Ginny said. "I got it from Dumbledore's office a couple of weeks ago. I was sent there for a detention and was told to straighten out some papers. Dumbledore stepped out and I accioed and copied some of his other papers about Harry including this one."

"You're so screwed," Rosie Rosier said.

"Tell me about it," Ginny sighed.

"I don't understand," Hermione began.

"Basically," Ginny said, "when I was not even four months old, my parents sold me off. According to this, I have to marry Harry and have a kid before I'm even sixteen. If you really must know what that means, it means it was pointless even sending me to Hogwarts since I'll never sit for my O.W.L.s much less my N.E.W.T.s."

"Why not? Is there a rule against that sort of thing?"

"No," Daphne said. "You won't find it in Hogwarts: A History, but the school has had married students in the past and even some with kids although I think the last was over two hundred years ago."

"But my Mum will insist I drop out and focus on my duties as a mother," Ginny said. "She's really old fashioned that way. She can't understand why any witch who's married would want a job or why a witch would keep working once she had a child."

"This is so..." Hermione began. "Surely it doesn't mean you have to..."

"DO YOU SEE THE BIT ABOUT POTIONS?" Ginny yelled. "THEY AGREED THEY CAN FORCE US TO!"

"They'd both still be underage," Susan added calmly. "By agreeing to set the marriage date before either child is of age, it means the adults can see it happen regardless of what the children want themselves!"

"That's ... that's..." Hermione began.

"It's a practice that has fallen out of use," Daphne said, "but it's still legal. It was a way to make sure Pureblood lines remained pure. Basically, this contract trumps their own personal feelings. Oh, they aren't forbidden to date or even sleep with others beforehand. But in the end, they can't choose who they marry."

"And don't think my Mum won't see this through given half a chance! She's been telling me I was destined to be Harry Potter's wife for as long as I can remember and I believed her! That changed after the Chamber of Secrets. I admit I had a huge crush on him, but after that year... I still like Harry, but I grew up I guess. Being forced to do things against your will tends to do that I suppose. We both deserve to choose our lives, but this piece of rubbish says our lives were chosen for us before either of us could even talk! Even if Harry and I were in love, I sure as hell don't want to quit school! And we're not! I do love him, but not that way! I know he doesn't see me that way. And yet, in little over a year we're to get hitched and start spitting out sprogs whether we want to or not! I don't even get to choose! If I don't get busy right away, I'll be poisoned up!"

"I can't believe your parents would agree..." Hermione began.

"They worship the ground Dumbledore walks on," Ginny said. "Certainly my Mum does and I don't know if my Dad has his own

opinions. If he has, it's never said in front of us. Hogwarts isn't cheap, you know. My parents had to send seven of us through school and ... well my Mum's the type who would consider a Hardship Scholarship an insult. Whatever Dumbledore's plans are, this contract is putting us through school. Giving Dad the benefit of the doubt, he might think this contract will never actually be enforced."

"They are out there," Lucinda said. "Contracts like these are used to get around tax laws about gifts and stuff. But they usually have out clauses."

"Out clauses?" Hermione asked.

"Such as not requiring any action before the children turn twenty-five or so and allowing the children to void the contract by marrying someone else before then. Something like that. There's no out clause in this one, which means there are penalties if this contract is breached."

"What sort of penalties?"

"Well, if the Weasley's were to refuse to go through with this or if Ginny got out of it, the Potter Estate could demand repayment of all monies paid out as of the date of the breach."

"I figured it out," Ginny said. "Including all the school expenses which put all of us through thus far, that would be over 40,000. I'm certain we don't have that much."

"And if Harry were to..."

"If Dumbledore backed out, Arthur and Molly could claim an equal amount from him or half of any vaults he has access to on Harry's behalf, whichever is greater," Lucinda said. "Dumbledore, however, is the one who has to pay it. He signed the deal, he pays if he backs out. Fortunately for Harry it was not signed by House Potter, otherwise half of the Potter Estate would forfeit to the Weasleys. House Potter was one of the wealthiest families in magical Britain and I seriously doubt Dumbledore has access to their main vaults. Basically, neither side can afford not to see this contract through."

"And given we believe we need to get Harry out from under Dumbledore's control, this contract is a problem," Susan said.



"Ginny said her parents and certainly her mother are Dumbledore's through and through. The best you could hope for is Dumbledore controlling Harry through his Mother-in-Law."

"Whom he still respects," Hermione added. "Ginny? You said you love Harry. Assuming this contract can't be avoided..."

"The potions, Hermione," Ginny said in a voice pleading that she would be believed. "It doesn't place restrictions on what kind! There are potions out there that make one very susceptible to suggestion and control, not unlike the imperious curse and, while it takes a real Master to make those, Dumbledore does have one in his pocket, right? The Ginny you know, Harry knows, I am and dream to be would be gone. The only hope for all of us begins with getting Harry and Neville out from Dumbledore's control and trained up proper, right? That means this contract must be avoided. The only way to do that is for me to die."

"WHAT?"

"Is that true?" Katie asked.

"It would void the contract," Daphne said. "Harry can't marry a dead person. It was a common way to avoid these types of contracts and, so long as neither Dumbledore nor Harry was implicated, there is no breach. But, it is hardly the only way to void the contract."

"I think we should not consider death as an option," Hermione said.

"I could start taking purgatives," Ginny said. "It wouldn't get me out of the contract, but at least I would be in my right mind. Then again, a proper draught would counteract all but the nastiest of potions."

"An option," Hermione agreed. "Not one that I like, but it's better than just giving up. Still, are there any other ways to get out of this contract?"

"The easiest way would be to replace Dumbledore as Harry's magical guardian before any irreversible steps are taken," Daphne said. "However, it is also probably impractical."

"How would it work, assuming it could be done?" Katie asked.

"The contract is between Ginny's parents and Dumbledore as Harry's guardian. It's not between Ginny's parents and Harry or House Potter. If Dumbledore ceases being Harry's magical guardian before the proposed marriage, the contract is voided. Harry and House Potter are not obligated to honor the contract independent of Dumbledore."

"I doubt Dumbledore would do us the favor of dying or stepping down," Hermione grumbled.

"Then what would be needed was someone with a better claim to Harry," Daphne said. "Does he have any godparents?"

"Sirius Black," Hermione said.

"Who's a fugitive," Daphne nodded. "As such he can't act as guardian. Does he have a godmother?"

"Alice Longbottom," Hannah said. "I looked that up over the Hols. But she and her husband are both confined to the Long Term Care Ward at St. Mungo's."

"Same problem," Daphne said. "Unless there is a Will out there that says otherwise, Godparents automatically become an orphaned minor's magical guardian unless they are legally unfit to serve as such, which is the case here. If Black were cleared of all charges against him, he would become Harry's magical guardian."

"I doubt that's going to happen," Hermione said. "What we learned about that trial shows that Dumbledore knows he is innocent and yet is at least partly behind his imprisonment. As head of the Wizengamot it would be little effort for him to clear up this matter, yet he does nothing."

"Even a Will is no guarantee," Lucinda added. "The monetary part of an Estate can be passed on by Gringotts as can most property. The Ministry of Magic has jurisdiction over the distribution of magical artifacts. It can block through seizure any heirlooms of a dark, magical nature. But the issue of orphaned children, to include custody and magical guardianships and such is handled through the Wizengamot. As Dumbledore controls the Wizengamot..."

"He could prevent that part of the Will from being enforced," Hermione nodded. "Certainly should it contain provisions that would in any way interfere with his control over Harry."

"The only other way to replace him as magical guardian is to have the Wizengamot declare him unfit," Daphne concluded.

"Again, as if that's gonna happen," Ginny groaned. "Why did I have to fall in love with someone else?" she moaned, and then shut her mouth looking embarrassed.

"Okay," Parvati said, "spill! Who's the bloke?"

"Don't even say Malfoy," Tracey said.

"Don't even joke about that," Ginny said. "Besides, I doubt he even likes girls."

"According to Pansy," Daphne said, "he swings both ways. She's part of his shag club with Crabbe, Goyle, Millicent Bulstrode and Desdemona Selwyn. Membership means you shag whoever's in the club without regard to their plumbing and preferably in groups."

"Okay, I really didn't need that image," Hermione said as several others groaned.

"Why'd she tell you that?" Rosie asked. "She should know you might use it against her."

Daphne shrugged. "She asked me to join last year. As I said before, I'm not into farm animals."

"Can we please get back to this contract?" Hermione pleaded.

"Sorry," Daphne said.

"So who is it, Gin?" Parvati pressed.

"Contract!" Hermione began.

"You need to lighten up just a tad, Hermione," Katie said gently. "Besides, something tells me this information could be helpful."

"Fine!" Hermione huffed.

"Well?" Parvati said looking at Ginny.

Ginny mumbled something.

"Excuse me?"

"ALRIGHT! It's Neville! He might deny it, but he's been my best friend since last year and tried to be first year when it seemed everyone else was ignoring me. Actually, I was ignoring everyone given things, but that's not the point! We've been studying together all the time for almost two years. He took me into Hogsmeade and to the Ball and even kissed me goodnight and I know he likes me and I know I love him, but he's such a boy about those things! AND BEFORE YOU ASK, WE HAVE NOT BEEN INSPECTING BROOM CLOSETS!"

"And Ron and the twins...?" Hermione began.

"Fred and George know," Ginny said. "They trust Neville and I trust them. I'm not about to tell Ron. He'd run straight to Mum and given this contract, I'd be soused on Harry joy juice before you can say Merlin."

"I take it you mean potions," Parvati said with a giggle.

"That's SO wrong!" Ginny replied blushing catching Parvati's subtle innuendo.

"I apologize for my sister," Padma said. "She spends far too much time with our class perv Lavender."

Hermione actually laughed. "Lavender has quite the collection of – erm – boy maintenance manuals, although were she to know about Malfoy's club, maybe that'd cure her."

"I'd appreciate it if you lot would keep quiet about that for now," Daphne said blushing. "I'm pretty sure they'd figure out how you lot found out and they can be quite nasty."

"Can we please get back to this contract?" Ginny asked. "Is there any way to get out of it?"

"Well, we can rule out getting rid of Dumbledore as Harry's magical guardian," Hermione said.

"And even if my parents changed their minds, unless Dumbledore does as well, they can't afford the penalties," Ginny said.

"And we can agree there's no reason to believe Dumbledore won't see this through?" Hermione offered.

The others all nodded.

"Are we stuck then?"

"There may be a way," Lucinda said. "It is - er - unusual and may well require some of us to make sacrifices we haven't been considering, but it could achieve our primary purpose of helping Harry and now Neville and get Harry and Ginny out from under that contract and Dumbledore and Ginny's mother's thumb. Basically, Harry and Neville - and Ginny for that matter - and maybe some of us as well need to become magically and legally emancipated."

"And how will that happen?" Daphne asked. "Dumbledore's acting as Harry's magical guardian and would need to approve. I doubt Ginny's parents would do that either, especially if they can't afford the consequences. I doubt there is a reason why Neville's family would allow it either. Without their approval, it's not going to happen."

"There is a way," Lucinda said. "First, however, I need to ask how many of you are under betrothal contracts like Ginny?" she said raising her own hand. Several other hands rose as well. Only the Muggle Borns, Daphne, Tracy and Gabrielle did not raise their hands.

"Right," Lucinda said. "Claws first. Laura? I take it's because your Muggle Born you're not raising."

"That's like from the Middle Ages," Laura said.

"Lisa then? How much do you know?"

"It's fairly open ended," Lisa replied. "So long as I'm not married or engaged otherwise by my twenty-first birthday, then it kicks in. His name is Rufus Scrimgeour. He's an Auror and such and forty-five and a total jerk. The only good thing I can say about him is he's not fat. Rather not marry at all, to be honest, but I'm almost as stuck as Ginny on this one."

"Luna?"

"I have until twenty-five to find a husband acceptable to Daddy," Luna replied. "After that, it's Rolf Scamander. He's a naturalist which is okay by me seeing as I wouldn't mind being one myself. His Grandfather was the author of One Thousand Magical Beasts and Where To Find Them. But he's old. He's even older than my Daddy and that bothers me to no end."

"Padma?"

"My sister and I are both betrothed to a man from India. We've met him. He's short, fat, bald, foul smelling and vile. We have until we're seventeen to find a way out. Both of us have to. If one can't, we go to that ..."

"And our father is not likely to approve of anyone other than him," Parvati said with a frown. "And honestly! Why would I want to be married to the same man as my sister! That and we know he already has a Harem and is just looking for fresher concubines!"

"That closes out Ravenclaw and Gryffindor, unless Katie is betrothed," Lucinda said.

"Nope," Katie said.

"Susan?"

"Actually, my family has a contract with Neville's. I have until I'm twenty-one. We've been allied for ages and Neville's nice enough. I'm not sure I'd mind."

"Hannah?"

"Harry actually."

"What?" Hermione asked.

"It's like Susan's, Hermione. Don't worry. You can take Harry off the market, but if you don't I don't think I'd mind."

"And our guests?" Lucinda asked looking at the two girls from Beauxbatons."

"My forming bond negated any contracts, if zere were any," Gabrielle said.

"A business associate of my father," Michelle added. "He's a pig."

"And speaking for the Slytherins," Daphne said, "we're all in loathsome contracts but they have out clauses requiring us to become engaged to an acceptable lad, otherwise we're stuck with the contract. Given acceptable means Slytherin makes me ill, to be honest. I'd rather not have that contract see the light of day as my potential betrothed is totally vile!"

"It's not Malfoy, is it?" Parvati asked.

"My one small blessing," Daphne said. "He's betrothed to Parkinson. Were it me, I'd be expected to be a good Pureblood and do his bidding and that means be a member of his little shag club! I'd rather not."

"So what's any of this got to do with Harry?" Hermione asked.

"What I'm proposing," Lucinda said, "and assuming we can work out the details, might be beneficial to all of us as well."

"And what would that be?"

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"I'll deal with the easy part first," Lucinda said. "This is the bit you will probably find the most acceptable."

Somehow, Hermione felt that meant totally unacceptable.

"Under our law code, if an underage witch gets pregnant by an underage wizard, they are semi-emancipated ... maybe."

"WHAT?" Hermione said. "YOU'RE SAYING I HAVE TO GET PREGNANT?"

"No," Lucinda said. "One of us has too. Earlier we said you're the logical choice because he would probably accept that. If he got one of us pregnant, we're both semi-emancipated. We are considered adults solely until such time as we both agree to bond magically to raise the child as ours. If we sign a magically binding contract to that effect – remember for this purpose we are considered adults – then we're married and become fully emancipated."

"It's not foolproof," Daphne added. "Given what you told us about Sirius Black – and you have to suspect our illustrious Chief Warlock kept that business swept under a carpet – there's reason to believe he'd do something illegal like obliviate the two of you and get rid of the child. Technically, that's illegal in our world. Aborting a magical child is a ticket to Azkaban. But with political pull or going to the Muggles, that's not really a problem. Dumbledore could just blank our minds and get rid of the child and no one would be the wiser."

"Provided the Contract was not already recorded at Gringotts," Lucinda said. "Once that happens, there's no way to get around it."

"And were he to try like that ..."

"He'd need to deal with the Goblins and probably wind up as a dragon snack. They don't take kindly to obliviations. But, that means the Contract would need to be recorded before he knew what was going on and were the pregnancy to be discovered here, that could be an issue. I didn't say this plan was perfect, but if successful it will achieve what we need to see done."



"It would also have to be known outside of Gringotts," Daphne said. "Probably by a fair few people and certainly by some Dumbledore didn't know about. Goblins don't usually share that sort of information so the Old Man might be able to keep it under wraps, unless he has reason to believe he can't possibly manipulate, control or oblivate everyone who knows."

"Either that or we find a way to keep it all secret until after the child is born," Lucinda said. "Once that happens, it's recorded in the Ministry Hall of Records naming the parents, whether they're bonded and would be in the next edition of the Daily Prophet. The law on this works. The bitch is in the mechanics and logistics of pulling it off without the Old Man being the wiser until it's too late."

"This would work for Neville and me too?" Ginny asked.

"What!" Hermione said, "why are you even thinking that?"

"Cause if Neville got me pregnant like that, that contract Dumbledore made is void. I can't be considered primary wife material if I'm having a child by any man other than Harry. I'd be damaged goods and the bloodlines of any of our children considered suspect."

"What about you and Neville?"

"Assuming they bonded," Lucinda said, "it all depends on Susan's contract. She can't stop the marriage from happening, but she could trump Ginny as Lady Longbottom. But the primary effect is still the same. The contract between Ginny's parents and Dumbledore is void."

"Okay, now I'm really confused," Hermione said.

"You're not the only one," Marcia added.

"And interesting," Lucinda said. "The laws we're talking about were designed to protect bloodlines on the one hand and ensure our society was not overrun by unwed mothers and bastards on the other. They are old laws. I don't think a case has come up under this part of it in two hundred years. But that's because we can shag like bunnies 'til we can't walk and we won't get pregnant. Since our first

month at Hogwarts, we all have a monthly with Madam Pomfrey and get a potion for female issues. You ever asked what it does?"

"I assumed it was for periods," Hermione said. "I'd already had my first one a couple months before."

"It's for that too. It also prevents conception. Each dose is good for three months, but fortunately the effects are not cumulative. Three months after you leave here – and all of us are seventeen or older by then – you're capable of getting pregnant. Until then, you're not."

"Then what is the point of this discussion?"

"The point is not the mechanics, but so show how the law can help us! We've already established the need to get Harry and Neville emancipated and the means to do it. Were we not concerned about Dumbledore, there would have been no real need to discuss how he might try to manipulate the situation, but it's something we need to deal with. Likewise, if we weren't on a contraceptive potions regimen, it would just be a question of getting shagged enough at the wrong time of our month. But we are so that's another mechanical issue we would need to work through.

"Right. So, to get them emancipated, we need to get them hitched given that no one who could do it for them will do it. Likewise, those same people probably wouldn't let them get hitched while they're underage anyway, so we needed away around that little problem. The law provides it where they get an under aged witch in a family way. That law allows them to marry the witch without much fuss, premarital publicity or permission of any parents or guardians. Once married, they are both fully emancipated. Without going into details as to how we get that far, will you at least accept that the law allows that?"

"I'd like to see it, but fine," Hermione said.

"Meet me in the Library after," Lucinda said. "Now going forward and assuming all those messy details are not a problem, and assuming you're carrying Harry's child, Ginny was right. We're not totally out of the woods. I assumed there were contracts out there because I also assumed you would be Harry's. You being a Muggle Born adds another wrinkle."

"What's that? You're saying despite all of that the law doesn't apply to Muggle Borns?"

"Oh it applies," Lucinda said. "But as Harry is the sole member of an Ancient and Noble House, he could be forced to accept another wife of – er – more acceptable station."

"So if I married him that way, he could be forced to divorce me anyway and then forced to marry another?"

"No, Hermione," Daphne said. "If your marriage is valid – and what Lucinda described could only be invalid if you were a Muggle or Harry's sister, half-sister or first cousin by blood, in which case the marriage would be annulled, then divorce is not really possible. What she's saying is Harry would wind up with two wives at the same time."

"But that's bigamy!" Andrea Lee said. "It's illegal!"

"That's a Muggle legal concept," Daphne began.

"And moral," Hermione retorted.

"And again Muggle," Daphne concluded. "Muggle Britain is Christian, yes? It's laws derive from that moral philosophy."

"And the wizarding world?"

"There are Christians," Lucinda said. "Mostly, they're Muggle Borns. Our history with that religion is not such that we are inclined to convert. Our culture and the laws it eventually created date to well before Christianity existed and when Rome was still a dusty little village that the rest of the world could easily forget. Ollivander's shop dates to 382 B.C. The major powers in Europe or influencing Europe were Persia and, to a lesser extent Egypt. Greece had beaten the Persians, but was still a disunited collection of city states. Rome had not expanded through all of Italy, much less beyond. This was before the wars with Carthage, Alexander the Great and all of that. Britain was Celtic and Druidic and it is from that lesser civilization that our culture and law derives and that culture did not prohibit plural marriages, they were just rare."

"Harems?" Katie asked.

"No," Daphne said. "That implies favoritism and a structure dominated by and suited to the husband without regard to the wives. While in some cultures, such an arrangement expects a husband to treat wives equally, he is the only one who legally matters. In most instances, there is but one real wife whom the law and culture truly protects. The rest are concubines, little more than slaves or, at best, live-in mistresses."

"Don't forget the marriage bond itself," Lucinda added.

"Ah yes!" Daphne said. "I really don't understand why they don't teach us that," she digressed. "We have to rely on our mothers and – well mine was pretty thorough but some... We're all witches. The marriage bond always involves a magical contract with the future spouse evidenced by the vows and such and a magical ritual."

"The wedding?" Katie asked.

"It may have no effect on a Muggle or very little, but it does affect us. It's one of the reasons why there's rarely a magical divorce. It won't make us love our husband, but it will at least make us more tolerant and more likely to get along with him. And no, it's not just us witches. A magical contract is a magical contract and a ritual is a ritual. It does something similar to the wizard."

"Don't get her wrong," Ginny said, "they still can disagree and my Mum can still fly off the handle at my Dad. As his personality is by nature less confrontational, he's just more likely to look at Mum's rant as her being her and not as something he need be concerned about personally. Likewise, my Mum is more likely to see my Dad's passivity as him being him as opposed to his not caring. But, if Dad does put his foot down, Mum shuts it although that's pretty rare."

"So the bond makes her take it?" Katie asked.

"No," Ginny said. "Least I don't think so. Her upbringing on the other hand would. She was raised a proper Pureblood girl and is trying to do the same with me. A proper Pureblood knows when to defer to her Pureblood or Noble husband."

"Guess she's failing miserably with you then," Parvati chided.

Ginny shrugged. "What can I say? I lose when I lose, not when someone tells me it's over."

The Pureblood and some of the magically raised witches chuckled.

"What's so funny?" Hermione asked.

"Ginny is strong willed," Luna said. "She always has been. But her will in a magical marriage might be something else."

Ginny nodded.

"What do you mean?"

"Remember," Lucinda said, "we're talking about magical contracts and rituals. Now, before you get upset, it doesn't totally change who we are as people. The magic binds us together but makes us accept that as well. Still, Ginny is strong willed. That won't change unless she herself changes naturally. But, as it is a magical compact, that tends to favor the more magically powerful one."

"Explain!" Hermione said.

"There's no such thing as a truly equal relationship," Lucinda replied. "There are truly mutual ones, but no truly equal ones. It is almost impossible to conceive of a relationship between two people where they are equally smart, equally forceful - or not so - and equal in all respects. Couples figure out when to stand up in a relationship and when to give in. If they truly respect each other, the lack of true equality is not an issue."

"But we're talking about marriages in our world: a magical contract for life bound by ritual. It mitigates some things. But the bottom line is this: in any magical contract, so long as the contract is honored, it is not the richer, smarter or more forceful personality who can be dominant. They can, but in the end they must submit to the true dominant partner."

"And who would that be?" Hermione asked.

"If one of them is decidedly more magically powerful than the other, that person is the dominant partner even if they seldom exercise it."

"Hermione," Parvati said, "you are the most powerful witch in this room and I dare say in this school, professors included. My sister and I have a gift where we can tell such things. We almost never do, but we can. You're right up there with Dumbledore."

"Blowing that whole Pureblood crap right out the window," Daphne added. "You add in your intelligence and your drive - it's a wonder you were not sorted into Slytherin, but given your birth status... - anyway, it's no wonder you master spells so quickly. You're at the top of our class. Your intelligence makes you wicked smart on theory. But that does not explain the practical side. You're a right powerful witch, Hermione."

Before Hermione could respond, Padma stepped in. "But," she said, "as smart and powerful as you are, you're nothing compared to Harry and not much better as compared to Neville. They are scary powerful as compared to any of us. That they don't show it..."

"Neville's wand," Hermione said. "And as for Harry, his upbringing is an issue. His relatives," she all but hissed, "are vile people! He didn't even know his own name 'til he had to go to school! If he got better marks than his cousin ... he never told me what they did except to say he tried not to." There were tears in her eyes by this point. "But what are you saying?"

"Were you to marry Harry," Lucinda said, "he would be the dominant partner."

"I ... and why ... is that a bad thing?"

"We've heard your stories," Daphne said. "He can be impulsive and he will rush off without thinking. He's a wonderful, kind boy and tops the list of 'boyfriend' potential. But his impulsiveness - so Gryffindor - is a potential problem. I'm not saying it should be suppressed, but it needs to be mitigated or he'll come to a bad end and with that prophecy, that is an issue!"

"In a Plural Marriage," Lucinda said, "his magic competes - for lack of a better word - against the magic of his wives. He may well listen to you, he has. But, he will ignore you if he believes he is right and, from what we've learned as part of this little club, he has from time to time. Harry can't have one wife. He's too powerful magically and his personality too dominant. Neville..."

"Who's about as powerful magically," Parvati added.

"...is not as dominant a personality," Lucinda said. "Still, he would benefit from a Plural Marriage as much as Harry."

"How?" Hermione asked.

"There is a saying that behind every great man is a great woman. There's also a saying that two minds are better than one. In a Plural Marriage, there's not just one woman helping her husband be more than he thought he could be. Likewise, unless he marries a bunch of total brain dead dolts... The Plural Marriage overcomes the normal stuff. A wife may be too weak in personality or magical power to curb her husband's baser instincts and vice versa. But, a true Plural Marriage, it becomes more of a collective. Magic and personality are less the issue between one person and the other as there are others whose personalities and magic can curb or override the issue. Basically, it's hard for one person to dominate the others in that form of relationship. The Plural Marriage is rumored to be very fulfilling to all within it."

"It almost sounds desirable," Katie said. "Almost. I take it there's a catch?"

"It fell out of practice," Lucinda said. "And, depending upon your point of view, there are catches. First, it only tends to work if the wizard is fairly powerful magically. Most wizards are not. The magical contracts would overwhelm them."

"Don't see a problem there," Parvati said. "Harry and Neville are way above the average."

Lucinda nodded. "It also was not allowed unless the combined family had sufficient resources to care for itself. Again, this is not a problem as House Potter and House Longbottom alone are very wealthy. Then there is the legal requirement that the marriage not distinguish based upon any factor unrelated to magic and ... well, the wizard was not required to marry a witch he found unattractive. But, if he was going to have a plural marriage, the wives' birth status, blood status, social status and such could not be a factor. The law basically required that the wizard include a pureblood and a Muggle Born and a half-blood of some description. Finally there's the fact

that the heir of such a family is always the first born son. It did not matter which wife gave birth to that son and disowning the son based upon his mother's birth status was against the law. Needless to say, given current attitudes that might cause a wealthy wizard some pause."

"That and the fact that the law supported that ban by making the wife legally at least at the same level as her husband," Daphne added. "A Muggle Born witch in a regular marriage remains a Muggle Born legally. Her husband can give her opportunities, but she is still a Muggle Born. In this example, as a Plural Wife she would cease being a Muggle Born legally and attain the same social status as her husband. Whatever barriers there were based upon her blood status would be removed."

"You said it fell out of practice," Hermione said. "That suggests in a way it didn't completely disappear."

"It hasn't happened in over a century or two," Lucinda said. "It was used from time to time. If a wizard's first wife had nothing but daughters, he had two choices. Bite back his attitude and enter a Plural Marriage and keep trying for a son or watch his line die out. Many chose the latter, although some the former from time to time."

"Ancient and Nobles Houses used it," Hannah said. "Ones like the Blacks would not have. They'd rather die than raise a half-blood or Muggle Born to instant high status. But there were others that were more concerned about their lines than their blood status. Lucinda said before that even if Harry was already married to you, he could be compelled to take another wife."

"How?"

"Well, it might be required by the family Will, if there was one," Hannah replied. "But, if there is a valid, betrothal agreement out there in favor of a – um – higher status witch, he could be pressured into it. Likewise, as the sole survivor of an Ancient and Noble Line, the contracts may require it. They do, in fact. Ginny's has no out clause for him. Hers can only be voided if she is no longer and acceptable match."

"In other words, if Neville were to knock me up," Ginny said.



"But it would not invalidate my contract," Hannah sighed.

"What?" Hermione asked in shock. "I thought you said it was an open contract."

"I don't believe I did," Hannah replied. "It is ... sort of."

"Sort of?"

"When it was made, our parents were still alive but because of the war, they realized it was possible Harry and I could be the last of our lines. We were only children then and my father was the last Head of the Ancient and Noble House of Abbott. There are no others aside from me who are in the line of succession if he died before another child was conceived and he did. The contract contained a line continuation clause as a contingency. I would marry Harry after my twenty-first Birthday as his designated second wife – even if he still did not have a first – if I failed to marry a wizard who agreed to continue the Abbott line. Few would do that as they have to give up their name and any claims they may have by way of any inheritances from their family. As a second wife, our children would be Abbotts and not Potters. They would continue the line, but would have no claim with regard to House Potter unless Harry left them a bequest in his Will. Likewise, whoever his other wife would be would continue House Potter."

"Which forces a Plural Marriage," Lucinda said. "Which means a Pureblood House could demand he take a third, Pureblood wife to comport with the spirit of such a marriage and he would either spend years in litigation trying to argue otherwise, or be stuck."

"Why?" Hermione asked.

"Again, assuming you're the first wife, he would have a Muggle Born and a Half-Blood as that's what the Abbotts are. The old custom suggested no distinctions based upon societal standards and right now that's blood status. Fortunately, political beliefs are not considered a criteria otherwise..."

Hermione and the others shuddered. They knew that probably meant a Pureblood daughter from a pro-Voldemort family.

"That means we either scrap this strange idea," Hermione said, "or go forward and allow both those contracts to self-execute or whatever..."

"The idea is to get Harry away from Dumbledore," Ginny protested. "I can't be part of that package! My family is too beholding to Dumbledore! I'm safe as a friend and wife of an ally, but not as a wife no matter what I want. My parents and especially my mother cannot be associated with Harry as legal family or we might as well do nothing, but we can't do nothing because by this time next year I might well be married to him anyway! Whatever we decide, my contract must be voided or we can't help Harry long term! And, if I am going to have to get preggers this young anyway, I'd rather it be Neville. I'm certainly not about to slut around."

"And my contract with House Longbottom is like Hannah's," Susan said. "It was not truly intended to make me a second wife, but given I was the last of my line if anything happened to my parents..."

"You're Aunt?" Hermione asked.

"She married my Uncle Edgar who was killed in the war."

"Oh." She turned to Lucinda. "You saw all this?"

"Not when I came here," Lucinda admitted. "The prophecy got me thinking about what that all meant and that this was about far more than just this silly tournament. Ginny's contract got me thinking about the voiding possibilities. When Hannah said she had a contract for Harry as well, I knew she was the last of her House and guessed she had a line continuation clause. That's what got me thinking plural marriages, which is why I have no idea about how to get around the non-legal problems."

"So your idea is some of us get pregnant and married?" Hermione asked. "How many?"

"I'd say as many as are willing from among us," Lucinda said. "We shouldn't pick and choose nor should we require it. Besides, due to those line continuation contracts, it would seem that Plural Marriage is all but inevitable for those two."

"I think we have to do this no matter what," Ginny said. "I wouldn't mind being Harry's wife, but you must know that would ruin him and I won't be a party to that. I'd prefer to think of Neville at this point. We need to void my family's contract with Dumbledore! That is critical! And the only way for that to happen is if I can't marry Harry. If Neville gets me pregnant, I know he'll do the right thing. Whether we can get Harry emancipated or not, that contract must be voided which means I must marry Neville!"

"And my parents will most likely try an arrangement between 'Arry and I," Gabrielle said. "I am Veela. He saved my life when I was not in a relationship. My magic is choosing him as a mate and, whether 'e chooses me or not, zat choice is for life. My parents will want 'im to choose me and 'ave the means to make it a desirable match."

"That and she's Veela, which means Harry will find her very attractive," Daphne said. "She uses that allure and..."

"Non," Gabrielle said. "I can assure you it will not 'ave the same effect on 'Arry as others. Fleur's has no effect on 'im."

"Still," Katie said, "he probably wouldn't kick her out of bed for eating scones. Considering he's not currently involved with anyone as far as we know, he probably would consider it."

Hermione nodded. "He probably would just to keep her from having a miserable life."

"And," Hannah said, "if Harry and Neville either became betrothed or married, it could trigger Susan and my families' contracts. While our contracts have an 'out' clause, they are very weak ones and all but unlikely. Given that our Houses are allied, my Mum could ask it to be honored and Harry would be expected to honor it."

"Which he would probably do," Hermione sighed. "So this Plural Marriage is more likely than not anyway?"

"So it appears," Lucinda said.

"Well that should make it easier for Harry to accept. I have no doubt he would not be in favor of this otherwise."

"Now we just need to figure out who the other wives will be," Lucinda said.

"Other wives?" Hermione asked in shock.

"The Line Continuation Contracts will create a Plural Marriage," Lucinda replied. "That, however, will still allow Dumbledore or his political enemies or both to pressure them into accepting wives from families loyal to those factions."

"Why?"

"Because the law allows for it. Remember, a Plural Marriage is not supposed to distinguish based upon bloodlines. If you get pregnant, for example, that could trigger Hannah's contract, but it only gives Harry a Muggle Born wife. To comply with the spirit of the law and custom, he would need a Pureblood and a Half Blood wife as well."

"But isn't Hannah one of those?"

"In a way, she does not count because her children by Harry would be House Abbott and not House Potter. The Purebloods would want a shot at the House Potter Heir and so would Dumbledore who, no doubt, would be pushing a malleable if not loyal Half Blood for certain. The only way to avoid that is to close that door tight. If, when this becomes public, Harry already has the required types of wives, his political enemies' hands are tied. He's emancipated and out from their control."

"At which point," Susan said, "we can see to it that both Harry and Neville receive the training they should have been getting all along."

"So both Harry and Neville will need four wives?" Hermione said.

"At least," Lucinda replied.

"AT LEAST?"

"Hermione," Luna said, "there are eighteen of us dedicated to helping Harry and now Neville as well. Five of us seem destined to be either Harry or Neville's wife - or one of them anyway. We need three more to close that door Lucinda spoke about and they should come from those here in this room whose loyalties we do know."

Harry needs a Pureblood wife and Neville a Half Blood and a Muggle Born. But, should we be so limiting? Does it really make that much of a difference if Harry has more than four wives, especially if we know they are trustworthy? I'm not saying we all should be part of that, but we all should be given that chance if we want it and if we do we should not be denied that chance. It's only fair."

"We don't have to make this decision today, Hermione," Parvati added. "We may be a little rushed, but not that rushed. Besides, all of this is academic unless we can figure out the mechanics as Lucinda called them."

"You're right, we don't," Hermione said. "Once we cross that line there's literally no going back and, until we figure out how to cross it without Dumbledore stopping us, this is only a discussion. First of all, we're all on a birth control potion and until we're not, this idea can't even hope to succeed."

"Hermione?" Ginny interjected, "we need to do this somewhat fast. Harry turns fifteen this summer and sixteen next. He's to be married to me by the end of that summer if not sooner. Reading that contract, I wouldn't be at all surprised if my mother tried something this summer! It's my own fault! I told her I had feelings for a boy and it was not Harry!"

"And as if things couldn't be more complicated," Hermione sighed.

SATURDAY, MARCH 18, 1995

Hermione Granger had a "Harry Saving Thing." She had kind have known that all the while, but it was only this year that she finally accepted that fact. It had begun almost from the moment they first met. They had first met on September 1st, 1991 in a railway compartment on the train that first brought them to Hogwarts. Hermione had only just found out she was a witch that summer when she and her parents received a visit from Professor McGonagall, the Deputy Headmistress of the School.

Her parents were about as ordinary as two people could be. They met at Manchester University and started dating. They continued to date all through University and then Dental School. They married the summer after they finished Dental School. They both received jobs at a dental clinic near Oxford in England. Their "boss" was an older man and highly popular dentist, which was saying a lot given what most people tend to think about seeing a dentist. He had hired them in the hopes they would take over his practice one day so he could retire and spend time traveling the world with his wife, which eventually happened. Hermione remembered on evening when she was a little girl when her father had a particularly bad day of it with about five difficult patients when he commented that he was sure people would rather hear from their doctor that they had some kind of serious and maybe even terminal disease than from their dentist that they needed a cavity filled or a root canal.

Hermione was born September 19, 1979, two years after her Mum and Dad started working. Her Dad's family came from some wealth. Not enough that they could afford to live in a manor or something, but it was enough to provide the best possible care for Hermione while she was growing up as her mother still wanted to work. She knew her parents loved her very much. She also knew they wanted to have another child, but had put it off until she started primary school. That was almost ten years ago and still they had not had one. Hermione wondered why, but figured it was personal and if she needed to know they would have told her.

Primary School was not a lot of fun for her. Her studies were just fine. She was always at the top of her classes and she liked most of her teachers. The other children, however, were another matter. She was not really picked on much or bullied. She was the oldest in her year and therefore bigger than most of her classmates, although not

by much. Maybe that was the reason. That little fact was announced on her very first day of classes and a lot of the students seemed put off by it. Add to it her marks, and there was something else that set her apart. It probably did not help, she thought, that her parents lived in the country and she had no friends her own age to play with before starting school. She was used to adults, not children her own age and she personally found them immature. She never recalled saying that to any of them, but she now thought they probably sensed that about her too.

She never had any friends before primary school and she never really made any while she was there. Well, she made one. It was a girl who had transferred in a couple of years after she started. The girl was named Casey and was an American. Her father was spending a couple of years teaching at Oxford as part of some program or another and Casey was about as smart and well read as Hermione so naturally the two bookworms (which was about the worst thing anyone called her) would become friends. Unfortunately, Casey and her family moved back to the States two years later and Hermione was alone again.

Odd things occasionally happened to Hermione as a child. She now knew it was "accidental magic." Her mother told her that her first manifestations were what she now knew was summoning. She was maybe a year old and in her crib and her mother had forgotten to pick up her teddy when she put her to bed. So she summoned it. Ordinarily this might have gone unnoticed, except the bear was in another room and her mother had just seen it and was about to pick it up when it happened. At the time, her mother had no idea what to think except that perhaps she'd been working too hard.

There weren't really that many bouts of magic. Maybe one or two a year. When she got to Hogwarts, she heard all kinds of stories about accidental magic from others in her year and they seemed to happen much more often. Being a Muggle Born, emotionally she was worried that her infrequent bouts meant she was not as magical as the others. Intellectually, she knew this was false. Accidental magic was a response to extreme stress, usually anger or fear. She remembered her other bouts were usually when she was really angry. She wondered about that first one. Her mother later told her it was because when she was a baby, she always slept with that bear so when it was not there, maybe...

Saving Harry became her mission early in First Year. It did not start on the train, although it could have. She had read a lot about him, fortunately from the non-fiction section at Flourish & Blotts. (She later was shown Ginny's "Boy-Who-Lived" collection at the Burrow and honestly, those books made Rita Skeeter and Gilderoy Lockheart look like paradigms of factual integrity, then again those books were in the "fiction" section of the store.) The non-fiction actually said more about Harry's dead parents than him. His role in history was limited to no more than a few pages at most and in that case, most of it was about the fame he had following his parents death and his disappearance from the Wizarding World. They did note that Dumbledore had something to do with that and that he also was not talking to anyone about it.

The books she had were somewhat different in their "spin" on the facts. One stated that Harry was the sole survivor of an attack on his home that left his parents dead and "You-Know-Who" destroyed. The other one painted the fifteen month old child as more the hero than survivor. What was odd, she thought, was most people would tell you that Harry killed Voldemort that Halloween night in 1981, but she had never read that in a history book. The closest any book came to saying it was:

"After having killed James and Lily Potter, the self styled Dark Lord apparently turned his wand on the little one. As horrifying as it would seem that any wizard would stoop to killing a magical child, it must be remembered that this man and his criminal element followers had never distinguished based upon age. The evidence is sketchy, but it is generally believed he did in fact cast the Killing Curse on the boy. What happened next is nothing but speculation and conjecture, but the boy lived and Voldemort was destroyed. Magical Forensics from DMLE did, however, confirmed that there was trace magic from the curse on the boy in a report to Minister Bagnold dated 2 November 1981. The boy had spent a day at the Healer Clinic in Godrics Hollow Wales before he was placed with guardians."

Hermione liked that book. Looking back, she liked the author's wording for Voldemort and his followers and now was surprised, given the fame Harry had, that he had not used Harry's name in this section. (It appeared later in discussions of the wild speculation about what had happened and the fame of a boy few in the magical world had ever seen before he was about to go to Hogwarts.)



Looking back, she wondered what kind of first impression she made on Harry. It probably was not a good one. Harry was sitting with Ron on the train as Hermione came by helping Neville find his pet toad Trevor. Ron was about to attempt a spell on his "pet Rat" Scabbers (who they later learned was actually an animagus named Peter Pettigrew who had been living as a rat ever since he betrayed Harry and his parents, murdered a dozen Muggles and managed to get Sirius Black framed for it, although no one knew that at the time and the Ministry still denied that they could ever be wrong about Sirius). It was not a real spell Ron tried, which Hermione of course had to point out, then show off some real magic she knew and then tell Harry she had read all about him in books she had picked up in Diagon Alley. That was hardly an endearing way of making a favorable impression Hermione would later think.

It seemed that Harry never gave that disaster much thought and was nice to Hermione from that point onward. Ron was another matter. He detested her. She was still convinced the only reason he can be civil to her at all is because Harry was her friend. She considered Ron a friend too as in A friend. Harry, however, was her best friend.

She became Harry's friend and he became her best friend on what would otherwise have been the worst day of her life. She had been friendly with Harry before then, and probably was already into Saving Harry, but they were not really friends yet. At primary school, she was mostly ignored. Aside from Casey, she never had a friend and a part of her had hoped that now that she was here, she might actually make some real friends. But her roommates mostly ignored her the first couple of months. She had three. Sally-Anne Perks was a Muggle Born like herself who had to be the shyest person Hermione ever met. She never really spoke to anyone unless spoken to and even then said very little. Even four years later, Hermione knew little about her. Parvati Patil and Lavender Brown hit it off the first night at school, mainly because they both were obsessed with clothes - and later boys. Since Hermione's interests were books and homework, she was ignored for a time. Hogwarts was the first time in her entire life she had every really been picked on by anyone. She was a target of what she now knew was the Slytherin Shag Club just because of her parents and it bothered her.

The truth was, while it was not totally awful, Hermione was terribly homesick and not having a friend made it even worse. She was feeling particularly down about it that morning. October 31st was her

Mum's birthday and was always a big thing at home, ranking right up there with Hermione's Birthday (which only her parents remembered, then again it was not like she told anyone at school about that at the time) and Christmas. So of course, Ron has to be a loud mouthed idiot and comment upon her lack of friends. When she heard that all she wanted to do was go home and never leave again.

Parvati actually tried to get her to calm down and come to dinner that night, but she was too upset and stayed in the girl's bathroom fighting the urge to write her parents and beg to come home. Intellectually she knew that was not what she needed. Emotionally, however, she wanted to be with them again. Right about the time she decided that she was not going to run home, a troll came lumbering into the bathroom and Hermione was sure she was dead. Then Harry came in, jumped on the troll and convinced Ron (who had reluctantly followed him) to do something and by some miracle, Ron actually did a decent spell (his first of the year) and as a result the Troll was knocked out by its own club. To this day she did not know why she lied to Professor McGonagall when she told the Professor she had come looking for the troll herself only to get cornered. The truth was just as amazing if not more so. But she did because she didn't want to admit she had been crying her eyes out for hours and hours.

Hermione knew enough about life debts. She owed one to Harry at that time. She wondered if she still did given their adventures. But she also knew that while such debt could account for her Harry Saving Thing, the truth was that began before the troll. She had already taken to helping Harry with his homework if he ever asked and she had tried to keep him from getting in trouble in that stupid midnight wizard's duel with Malfoy (which was actually a trick to get Harry in trouble as Malfoy sent Filch to catch them). But ever since the Troll, she would always do whatever needed to be done to keep Harry as safe as possible, which was difficult as it seemed every year someone or something wanted to kill him. She even would defy him, if that's what it took. Last year Harry had received a brand new Firebolt, said to be the best flying broom available bar none and wickedly expensive as it if you had to ask the price, you had no business buying it. Hermione was convinced Sirius Black had sent it (and was right about that.) At the time, everyone was convinced Sirius was trying to kill Harry so Hermione was convinced the broom was an attempt on his life and against Harry's wishes and to Ron's horror, she told McGonagall who confiscated the broom until it could

be thoroughly tested. Harry was angry with her for about a week. Ron wouldn't even speak to her until the broom was returned.

Hermione had been thinking about her friends a lot over the last week, especially after Lucinda had shown her the law books proving her idea was legal and was probably the only way that Harry was going to get out from under whatever Dumbledore was up to. She had already made her mind up about this. If Harry's life were normal, she would probably sit back and wait for Harry to make his own decisions about his life and all she really wanted and needed from him was to be his friend and for him to be happy. She could tolerate his being married to someone else on that condition. But to lose Harry as a friend for any reason was something she did not think she could bear.

Ron on the other hand was another matter. She might get angry or frustrated with Harry from time to time but she had always really liked him. She liked Ron when he was not being lazy, insensitive or stupid. Basically this meant she liked Ron a few hours a week, usually on Mondays and Tuesdays before his homework began to pile up and he started to expect her to help. He was really pissed at her right now. She was so busy with all this stuff and he came up expecting help with six assignments, two of which are already overdue and she refused. The truth was she was too busy to help him right now and it was, as usual, his own damn fault for not even trying to get it done himself. Harry never did that. Harry would ask for help as well, but always long enough before a deadline so as not to get under Hermione's skin. Even then, what he usually asked for is for her to look it over, to guide him through it not do it for him like Ron always expected, and always got told:

"Every time, Ronald," Hermione said raising her voice, "every time! Every time you come basically ask me to do your homework for you and every time I tell you I'll look it over when it's finished! For almost four years! Do you honestly think I'm going to change my mind on this? You honestly think I've got nothing better to do with my time tonight than to practically do your homework for you that you should have started last week?"

"You'd do it for Harry!"

"No, Ronald. Harry does not usually come to me the night before a paper is due and ask me to practically help him write it! When he

has no idea about an assignment, he asks me DAYS before it's due. Usually, all I do is look it over and suggest corrections! On the RARE occasions where it's the night before, he has a really good excuse - usually a few days in the Hospital Wing - and I know that before hand."

"But Hermione?" Ron begged trying not to totally lose it although Hermione knew he was going to fail spectacularly.

"FINE!" Hermione said.

"That's great!"

"But first you'll have to hire me as your private tutor. I believe the going rate is twenty-five galleons a month."

"WHAT?"

"I have things to do to, Ronald. I don't spend half the week playing chess or exploding snaps and I still have a lot to do! If you want me to fit your homework into my schedule, I expected to be compensated for my time!"

"You're mental! Completely mental!"

"No Ron, I'm BUSY!"

That had been a couple of nights ago and knowing Ron, it might be a week before he spoke to her again and of course he would not apologize and would act as if nothing happened. If he was not Harry's friend, she would probably have little to do with him. Aside from being Harry's friend, they really had nothing in common. She was a Muggle Born. He probably could not spell the word Muggle, much less tell you anything about them. She liked to read. He only read when he had to - as in when Hermione would not give him a verbal summary. Her parents were well off. His family was not. This was not as big a deal in the Wizarding World as they were more concerned about blood status than anything else, but that was a factor in the Muggle World. He liked Quidditch. Hermione liked Harry Potter who played Quidditch really well. She was at the top of her class. Ron ranked 28 out of 39. Academics was important to her and he could care less.

Harry on the other hand was Muggle raised. Admittedly, his relatives were abysmal, but he knew that world. Harry did not read for fun as far as she knew, but he probably had never been allowed to and certainly never encouraged to. His homework showed he could read very well as he was 18th in their year (mostly due to History of Magic which he hated and Potions which Professor Snape had long before made intolerable). Harry played Quidditch, but it was not his world the way it was for Ron. If Britain banned Quidditch, he'd probably shrug. Ron would die of a heart attack. The truth was, she had always enjoyed Harry's company more and they certainly had more in common. The truth was the girls were probably right. She loved Harry Potter and had for a long time. If Harry had and was going to have an ordinary life, she could live with that so long as she remained his friend. But Harry was not going to have an ordinary life. If this bizarre plan was his fate, she would be beside him every step of the way. She knew what that meant. She knew it meant she was going to marry him. It surprised her how easy that thought was. It did not scare her in the least. It seemed like that was what was meant to happen anyway, it's just a little more complicated than she had expected.

She was waiting in the "Clubhouse" for the other girls to arrive wondering how this meeting was going to go. She had some ideas and knew they probably had some as well. So far, there was no word about what the Third Task would be, so Hermione's Harry Training time was down to about five hours a week where they practiced whatever new spell seemed useful. This time, they would know what was coming up. They would be told on May 24th, a month before the task itself and Harry had agreed that they would then know what he needed to learn.

Parvati had come up with a very interesting idea about how to make their "plan" work, but at first Hermione thought it might not work. There was not enough time. If only they had Time Turners, she had thought. That, of course, led her to the Library and she found something interesting. She would need to run it by the others, of course. But that trip to the Library also led to an interesting conversation with an odd House Elf.

Prior to the Quidditch World Cup, Hermione had never seen a House Elf before. She had heard about them from Harry after Harry's encounters with an Elf named Dobby. Still, had it not been

Harry telling her, she would have thought someone was having her on. Then there was the World Cup where she met her first House Elf. The elf was named Winky and "belonged" to Mr. Crouch, Head of the Department of International Cooperation. After the game, Hermione was present when Mr. Crouch "fired" that elf. As far as Hermione knew, he really had no cause. True, she had disobeyed and order, but who could be expected to obey and order where you might get killed? She was a servant, not a soldier! It really upset Hermione and when Ron seemed to think that was normal, she was even more upset! The real reason Winky was fired is something happened and Crouch was concerned about his reputation. Hermione had no idea what that something was, but was pretty sure it was not what it appeared to be. The whole incident incensed her and then learning that there were perhaps hundreds of House Elves at Hogwarts made her more upset and she could not understand Ron's attitude! Still, she admitted she knew nothing about them except what Harry had told her and what she had seen at the World Cup. She had thought about seeing if there was something in the Library about them, but had forgotten to look. After all, once Harry's name came out of the cup it was a minor thing really. She was here for another idea, and now was looking at a book about House Elves wondering whether she should check it out too. Just as she was about to reach for it, she heard a "pop."

"Is you being Miss Grangy?" a high pitched voice asked. Hermione turned and saw a sight that would have made her laugh. It was clearly a House Elf, but this one wore clothes. Given that fact it would be odd as she heard they did not. But add to it this elf had the oddest sense of fashion. He wore one neon yellow sock and one bright red sock on his feet, what looked like a pair of lederhosen tucked into which was what was obviously and AC/DC tee shit. Hermione seriously doubted the elf had any idea who AC/DC were.

"I'm Hermione," she said.

The elf nodded excitedly. "The Great Harry Potters Bestest Friend," he said as if it was a title. "Miss Grangy also being the one who wants niceness for House Elves?"

She nodded.

"We needs to talk, Miss Grangy," he said and before she could do a thing, she was somewhere else.

"Where am I?" she demanded. It could be anywhere in the castle by the looks of the place.

"We Elves calls it The Come and Go Room. What wizards and witches who knows of it calls it the Room of Requirement, though few do know of it. Professor Dumbles has been at this school longer than anyones alive, yet he be's here but once to use chamber pots. The Professor with thick glasses is here often to hides her empty Sherry Bottles in the Hiding Room. Nasty Filch been here a couple times for cleaning supplies. Asides from that, Miss Grangy's roommate brings boys here to play naked games."

"Parvati?"

"No's. Other one."

"Lavender?"

"She should. She keeps getting caught in Broom Closets by boy prefects. But other one."

"You're kidding!" Hermione really did not want to think about that. "Wait, you said there are chamber pots, empty Sherry Bottles and cleaning supplies. I don't see anything!"

"The room is what's you asks it to be, Miss Grangy. It can be's huge or tiny, filled with things or empty. It's very magical."

"Why am I here then?"

"Because Dobby needs to talk with Miss Grangy away from the other elves and witches and wizards. Dobby's needing help and..."

"Are you in danger?"

"No. Dobby is happy. Dobby's friend Winky is not."

"Winky? Mr. Crouch's elf?"

"Winky be no ones elf, and Winky be dying from it Miss Grangy."

"Dying? What? Why? Where is she?"

"Follow Dobby," Dobby said.

Hermione followed the elf to a door at the back of the room. Dobby opened the door and Hermione looked inside. It was a small room with only a small bed. There was an elf in a dirty blue dress lying upon the bed and Hermione would have assumed the worse had the elf not been snoring.

Dobby closed the door and looked at Hermione. "Winky be sleeping now," Dobby said sadly. "Dobby brings Winky here when Winky be too drunk."

"Drunk?"

Dobby nodded. "House Elves don't be drunk normally. We can't work like that. But Winky be drunk all the time now."

"Why?"

"Being drunk and Winky not be feeling the pain so much."

"Pain? What pain? Surely a healer or something could do something?"

Dobby shook his head sadly. "Winky be in pain 'cause Winky be a free elf, Miss Grangy. Free elves die froms it."

"But you're a free elf! You take wages and have a day off and wear clothes! You're saying you're dying as well?"

Dobby shook his head again. "Winky be the onlyest Free Elf in Hogwarts, Miss Grangy."

"But Harry freed you! Are you telling me someone made you a slave again?" And if this was true, Hermione had a very good idea who that someone was: Dumbledore!

"No Miss Grangy. Dobby be here because the Great Harry Potter wishes it. Dobby has clothes because the Great Harry Potter wishes it. Dobby is being paid because the Great Harry Potter wishes it."



"You're his slave?" Hermione exclaimed. "When did he ... I'll kill him for doing that!"

"Dobby is being no slave. Dobby IS being bonded to the Great Harry Potter. But Dobby is being no slave. Dobby is being the Great Harry Potter's friend. The Great Harry Potter frees Dobby from bad wizards and asks nothing more from Dobby. Dobby can then chooses Dobby's wizard and chooses his Great Harry Potter. But Dobby knows that the Great Harry Potter not wants being chooses. Like Miss Grangy, the Great Harry Potter knows nothing of Dobby and elves and would cast Dobby away for choosing. So Dobby chooses and is now the Great Harry Potter's elf, but Dobby not tells. Dobby not wants another wizard." Dobby snapped his fingers and a book appeared in Hermione's hands. "Miss Grangy being the Great Harry Potter's bestest friend. Dobby being the Great Harry Potter's friend knows Miss Grangy needing books to believe. Read and Miss Grangy learns the truth about elves."

Hermione, being the reader that she was, could not say no. It was obviously a book she had never read and was not the book she had almost pulled from the library shelf. She wondered if that was a coincidence or if it was just a quirk of the odd elf before her. She read. As she read and learned, she did not abandon her notions of S.P.E.W. altogether. The "Society for the Promotion of Elfin Welfare" remained. But its goals shifted. If the book was right, freeing them was extermination. But a plan to stop their abuse - and the book said most were not abused - that was worthy, wasn't it? That would be her new goal, she thought before turning to Dobby.

Hermione stood up and began pacing the room. In a way she was furious! They have to be bound to us or they will die! Yet they are treated as slaves! Not all, to be sure, but many are! They are - they are - they are and can be so much more than most their wizarding bondmates allow! Many look upon them as just above dirt! That's what's wrong! And Winky is dying from lack of a bond and Dobby's afraid Harry will reject him. Not while I'm around! If necessary, I'll allow Winky to become my elf! And if Harry has any issue with Dobby being bonded to him...

"Dobby?" she asked.

"Miss Grangy?" he replied.

"Is this book true?"

"It is, Miss Grangy. It could say more, but it's true. Dobby wouldn't give it to Miss Grangy if it was lies."

Hermione paced back and forth for several minutes. She knew now what had to be done to save Winky. Someone had to bond with the elf. But she also suspected that Dobby somehow thought she was that someone. To bind another's life to her? Hermione could not accept that - or at least she could not have before. If what the book said was true, Winky would die unless a witch or wizard took her into a bond. If what the book said was true, the mere fact that Winky had been freed was enough to all but ensure that most would never bond with the poor elf. Crouch must have known that and that meant he had all but sentenced the poor elf to death! Hermione was there when it happened. Winky should not have been blamed or freed that way! It went against everything Hermione had been raised to believe, save the fact that if you can help someone you are morally obligated to do so.

At least that was how Hermione had been brought up.

"Would Winky accept me as a bonding?" Hermione asked after several more minutes of pacing.

"Dobby thinks Winky might," Dobby replied. "Miss Grangy's aura is powerful and good and Miss Grangy's heart is being right. But Dobby is not knowing what Winky will do. Winky will or Winky won't. But you be her bestest chance, Miss Grangy. Please try?"

Hermione nodded. Dobby seemed almost ecstatic and he took her hand and led her back to the small room where the other elf lay asleep. Then Hermione had a thought, one which the book she read quickly did not explain.

"Dobby?" she asked, "why can't she bond to Dumbledore? Aren't the others bound to him?"

"Winky won't bind to Mr. Whiskers," Dobby said. "Mr. Whiskers not be knowing about House Elves. Mr. Whiskers family never has elves before. Mr. Whiskers not be learning of them. Never considers them. We is what we is to him. We are tools, things, not more. The others be bound to the Headmaster, but not Mr. Whiskers. He be mortal

and can be's replaced. Any who be's in his place, the other House Elves be bound to. Winky not being bound, she wont's bind to him. Dobby cant's 'cause Dobby's being already bounds to the Great Harry Potter. Winky's, being free, can chooses and Winky not chooses Mr. Whiskers or Hogwarts. She's be wanting a true family."

"Dumbledore knows nothing about House Elves?" Hermione said in shock.

"He knows about us," Dobby said. "But his family never knew us. They had no elves. There are those who think we are nothing, and there's then those who think nothing about us. Mr. Whiskers thinks nothing about us 'cause he never had to. We elves don't truly exist to him. He 'hired' me and let Winky in, but we mean nothing to him!"

"That's so WRONG!" Hermione said.

Dobby nodded. "It is the way things being. Mr. Whiskers being not cruel, but he being not our family. The Great Harry Potter being Dobby's friend. Miss Grangy being wanting to be friend to all elves. That is what is being. But Miss Grangy can't fight the bonds. 'Tis folly to tries it. One elf at a time and one witch or wizard be all Miss Grangy cans do. Winky be needing a Miss Grangy to saves Winky. Miss Grangy will, won'ts she?"

Hermione nodded. It took about an hour, but Winky soon became Hermione's elf and very soon thereafter her dearest of friends. One could confide in their bound House Elf and not fear their confidences being revealed to others. It stunned Hermione that many witches and wizards never seemed to figure that out.

Hermione now sat in the abandoned hall waiting for the others to arrive. With a House Elf at her beck and call, much as that still bothered her, and another who would do anything to help her help "The Great Harry Potter," she now thought the "Club" had a real chance. House Elf magic was truly amazing, especially if freely given after all. She only hoped the others - or at least enough of them - would agree.

SATURDAY, MARCH 18, 1995

The other members of this club began entering in ones and twos. Hermione was seated in a chair going over some notes and thinking. She had tried to find a way to avoid the marriage option, but had come up with nothing. Thanks to Padma, she had found a book that was already proving useful, the question was whether the others would agree, or at least those others willing to go forward with Lucinda's plan. She had also decided that for those girls who decide not to participate, they will still be members of this group. That was probably the easiest decision she had been faced with this week.

If they were going to do this, if they were going to use Plural Marriage to get Harry out from Dumbledore's control, get Ginny out of that marriage contract and get Harry and Neville as trained as they could, Hermione had already decided she would be one of them. She had to. Her "Harry Saving" thing meant that she had to. That and there was the annoying fact that she now knew she truly did love him and truly did want to be his wife, even if that meant she had to share. The only other one she knew about for certain was Ginny. If anything, the girl was less reluctant about this than she was which confused her at first given how upset Ginny had seemed about the implications of that contract. Hermione could not see the difference really. Either way, Ginny would be a Mum before she even sat for her O.W.L.s. But Ginny had explained her reasoning. Like any girl her age, the idea of being married and all that was daunting to say the least, but her real fear was not the age, it was her Mum. Married to Harry, who would certainly remain under Dumbledore's control either by magic, or through Ginny's Mum, Ginny would be condemned to the life of a housewife before she was even sixteen. With Neville, she figured her Mum's influence would be far less as Neville's gran was not wrapped around the man's finger. (That and Neville's gran had a career as a Potions Mistress, which Neville had told her was how he was introduced to Herbology as a boy.)

When everyone was there, Hermione began. "First off, has anyone come up with an idea that will get Harry emancipated without having to take Lucinda's route?"

"I thought maybe an aging potion," Susan said, "but they wear off."

"Even if it didn't, time manipulation won't do it," Hermione said. "I was thinking along similar lines, but the law states you come of age on your seventeenth birthday, not when your seventeen years old and it was written that way to prevent a child from doing just that – or their parents for that matter. We could age him fifty years, and he'd still be a minor until July 1997."

"The ideas we came up with are all probably illegal," Daphne said. "As important as Harry is, I don't think using an Imperious Curse on Dumbledore is a great idea, assuming any of us could cast one."

"If only he was as thick as Professor Lockhart was," Hermione said. When the others looked at him, she explained. "Back during Second Year when everyone was wondering who the Heir of Slytherin was, Harry, Ron and I figured if anyone knew it would be the Slytherins. We had no idea how to find out, but figured there might be a way. We spent weeks in the library and came up with nothing so I figured maybe there might be something in the Restricted Section, but of course you needed written permission from a teacher. We wrote a permission slip and made Lockhart think we were asking for his autograph."

"The idiot would fall for that," Daphne laughed. "Did you find something?"

Hermione nodded. "Polyjuice Potion."

"Well, that would be a bust. It's really hard to make, isn't it? And it's not like you'll find the ingredients in your potions kit second year."

"I managed to nick what we needed from Professor Snape's private stores. We made it and it worked. Problem was, Malfoy – who we considered the most likely suspect – didn't know a thing or else wasn't about to tell Crabbe and Goyle a thing. That's who Harry and Ron changed into."

"You made that Potion Second Year?" Lucinda asked.

Hermione shrugged. "That won't help us now. But, even though we can't cheat Harry's Birthday, time manipulation might."

"Okay? What are you talking about?" Susan asked.

"Even if we had not had our meeting last week, even if we had not learned what we did about Harry and maybe Neville and certainly what Dumbledore is not doing, we can all agree that Harry is at a significant disadvantage in this tournament, right?"

The others nodded.

"And, even if we had been able to find a way to get Harry emancipated without Lucinda's plan, given what we now know about the prophecy, we can all agree that relying on Dumbledore and a normal Hogwarts education to get Harry and Neville prepared for what they will probably have to face sooner rather than later is a bad idea."

They nodded again.

"Throughout this, and even though Harry has done well so far, my primary concern is we don't have enough time what with school work, exams and all of that. We don't have enough time to do adequate research into spell or magic Harry may need for the task ahead and we certainly don't have enough time to teach him that magic and get him trained up. Harry learned one useful spell for the first task and if he hadn't pulled that off... If it weren't for Dobby, who overheard something about gillyweed when some Professors were talking about a book Neville had been given, Harry knew nothing that would have gotten him through the second task aside from what Professor Lupin taught us last year about Grindylows and Hinkypunks. We've managed so far on luck and mainly because we have always lacked the time to truly prepare! Time has been our enemy ever since Harry's name came out of the Goblet of Fire and it remains our enemy! If only we had a way to change that!

"Anyway, I'd been trying to figure out a way to change that pretty much from the start, but could not focus on it because it was more important to help Harry anyway we could than spend all our time trying to get around our time management problem. Besides, until we learned occlumency and had a place we could meet and not be overheard by anyone and I had a possible solution, there was both no reason to discuss this and a very important one as well."

"I can see the no reason," Marica said. "It would be a waste of our time and Harry's to dwell on the impossible. What was the important reason?"

"Because it's not impossible," Hermione said, "and because the reason I know this I'm not supposed to reveal to anyone, although I already had. Harry knows and he also knows why we're not doing it that way."

"Okay? What's that then?" Marcia asked.

"Last year, Professor McGonagall loaned me a Time Turner."

"A what?" Marcia began.

"Bloody Hell!" Daphne added. "Those things are ridiculously expensive, very dangerous and high regulated by the Ministry! What was she thinking?"

"What's a Time Turner?" another asked.

"It's an enchanted object that is said to send you back in time," Daphne replied.

"It does," Hermione said. "It's dangerous to get caught with one. I mean what if, for example you suddenly saw two of me?"

"Probably hex the both of you into next week," Daphne said.

"Which would cause problems because one of me had to go back in time for two of me to be there and what if both of me were still out cold when I was supposed to go back?"

"The timeline and everything would be destroyed," Marcia said.

"Actually no. That's Muggle Science Fiction. According to a book on time magic, what would happen if the version of me did not go back or existed in this timeline after she was supposed to go back is that there would now be two of me walking around. You can't afford to make that kind of mistake! We talked a bit about inheritances last week. I'm my parents only daughter and they do have some money. Which of me inherits? If there were two Ginny's, which one of her is under a betrothal contract? If there were two me's and one mouthed of at Professor Snape, do we both get detentions? And those are the least of the problems. What if one of me killed someone? Which one did it? That's why they're illegal for anyone to own."

"That doesn't make much sense. One of you becoming two?" Katie asked.

"That's the theory anyway," Hermione said. "I pretty certain it's wrong. In my opinion – and unfortunately events seem to bear it out – time is always linear even with a Time Turner. I saw my time turning as 'First Me' and 'Second Me.' First Me was the one who went through the day normally. Second Me was the one who went through the second time. Since First Me is the one who turned time and since once Second Me is back in time it already happened, the turning of time is fixed and permanent – it will happen as First Me remembered. There is always the risk something bad will happen to Second Me. Here's another way to think of it: if First Me turned time, First Me cannot be killed before turning time since she made it that far. Second Me is another matter altogether. She can die before First Me turned time, at least in everyone else's chronological perspective. And if Second Me died, that's it for me period.

"Now I believed what I read which is what I said at first. I believed I could in theory kill First Me or change things such that First Me died or that something could happen that meant First Me didn't go back after Second Me went back. Now I think that's about as silly as anything I've ever heard."

"Why?" Ginny asked.

"First, it's totally illogical and even magic has a logic of some kind. Second, it is such an alteration of time as to make time illogical and irrelevant, which would really upset the natural order of things. Third, if that was the case, why didn't someone just snuff Voldemort when he was a baby or why didn't he go back and kill James or Lily Potter before Harry was born? Because you can't. You can't change your timeline in any manner that prevents you from sending yourself back! Your time – or at least your past – is fixed and immutable from the moment it happens! If I went back and killed Voldemort before he was powerful, then First Me would come along and have no reason to do it at all! But, as I learned, Second Me CAN alter what should have happened if that alteration results in First Me turning time! In other words, I can go back and "save" my life!"

"Okay, I think I speak for all of us when I say I'm confused," Lucinda said.



She then briefly told them the story of how she and Harry and Ron learned that Sirius Black was an innocent man, how Peter Pettigrew was the real mass murderer and had escaped justice altogether because he was a rat animagus who had lived for twelve years as a rat, and most of that time as the Weasley family pet. She also told about how Snape had been there, but had been knocked out when Peter was finally revealed and how Peter managed to escape again in the confusion when Professor Lupin turned into a werewolf but how the werewolf had been distracted and ran off before he could hurt any of the others.

"Eventually, Sirius, Harry and I were down by the back lake. Sirius had been hurt and we went to help and suddenly we were surrounded by all the dementors that were guarding Hogwarts. While Harry could do the Patronus Charm, I couldn't and apparently it's really hard with that many dementors trying to do you in. We all passed out. But someone did cast a very, very powerful Patronus that drove all the dementors away. Snape saw it. Anyway, we were brought back to the castle and Fudge was getting set to leave Sirius to the Dementors. Ron's leg was broken, but Harry and I were okay for the most part. Dumbledore knew of my Time Turner and suggested I use it.

"We – Harry and I – went back before it all happened. It was I who's howl called off Professor Lupin, although we then had to run from him the second time. It was after we got away that we found ourselves watching our First Selves as the dementors closed in. They never sensed us. To be honest, I don't think I even felt them – not entirely. It was Harry who cast that Patronus that drove off the dementors. He said he knew he could because he realized he already had. At the time I thought that made no sense. But, if you accept that time can only be linear – that the Time Turner cannot really change that, then it made sense in a way."

They still looked confused. "What happened to Black?" Daphne asked.

"Well, in the course of our Second Time, Harry and I rescued Buckbeak – the hippogriff who Malfoy annoyed..."

"Pity it didn't kill him," Tracy said.

"And then Sirius. Sirius escaped on the hippogriff."

"Interesting story." Lucinda began. "But why was it necessary for Dumbledore to suggest using it?"

"Probably because he suspected I did. No one else had cast that Patronus. Snape was the only other wizard around at the time, so someone else had. There had been enough time for Dumbledore to ask around. He didn't tell me to use it. He made one of his odd comments talking about time in an abstract sense and reminded me I knew the rules. I think what he was telling me was sometimes rules are meant to be broken."

"How'd you get one?" Ginny asked. "A Time Turner I mean."

"To be honest, I didn't ask. I wanted to take every elective last year and McGonagall realized she could not talk me out of it. I don't know how she got it, but she figured I would not abuse it or make that mistake or that I would get caught. So, she let me use one to get to all my classes. As some of you may recall, our electives in Ancient Runes was at the same time as Muggle Studies and our Arithmancy was at the same time as Care of Magical Creatures. Yet I took all those classes. Almost no one suspected because, of course, only I knew I was in both places, although Ron and especially Harry thought I was up to something 'cause I said a little too much the first time I used it. I went on about Ancient Runes following our Divination class even though that class wasn't until later in the day. Fortunately, I managed to convince them I had only been reading ahead.

"There was another problem using that thing, one Professor McGonagall did not explain. First of all, it has limits that were explained. The one's the Ministry might allow someone to use will only allow you to go back a total of six hours a day. You can do that either all at once, or a few times, but only for a total of six repeat hours. Now with all those classes, it was not just a question of getting to them, I also had to study for them. Pretty soon, I was using it for six hours every single day. What I hadn't counted on was that while I get six extra hours for class and study, I was not getting any extra time for sleep nor was I eating any more than I had been. You don't get the extra hours for free. If you use it all the time, as I was, you need to sleep more and eat more all the time. I wasn't doing that."

"That's why you looked sick!" Ginny said. "That's why you almost had a breakdown!"

"That's why you stormed out of Divination," Parvati added.

"Took time to get to that point, but yes," Hermione said, "which was why I was not about to put Harry through that. Sure he might have learned a lot more before his tasks, but at what cost? He would be too tired to think straight and, unless he picked up Ron's eating habits, weaker than he was already. Basically, what he learned would be useless so unless I figured out something that would work, I figured it was best to focus on a handful of spells to get him past the next step, rather than try and make up for the fact that he's three years behind the others. And all of this assumed he didn't make any mistakes or get caught. It's easier for one person than for two."

"So you can't really change time?" Hannah asked.

"I don't think so," Hermione said. "What's in the past is always in the past. Once you turn time, it is already fixed. Second You was as much of that as First You was. And if Second You dies, that too was part of the past. I think the real reason Time Turners are so highly regulated is not because of any notion of true temporal chaos, but because they really have little use other than to commit crimes. If First Me murdered someone and managed not to get caught before turning time, Second Me could provide First Me with the perfect and air tight alibi or at least enough of a one that I might get away with it."

"They are considered Dark," Daphne nodded. "But I take it Time Turner's have nothing to do with what you're planning, right?"

"Only insofar as it led me to what can work in our case both for Harry's training and for Lucinda's plan. We need more time and that way is not the way to get it. But it's not the only type of time magic out there. It's both exceedingly rare and next to impossible to come up with ourselves."

"That and usually illegal," Lucinda added.

Hermione nodded. "But most time magic is actually fairly easy and quite legal," Hermione said. "It's not as complicated as overlapping

two of me in the same period of time. All we need to do is alter how time moves forward for us in a way that gives us more time in relation to everyone else!"

"Sounds just as dodgy to me," Katie said.

"Except most if not all of us have done it or at least know about it and know it's not dodgy at all!"

"Okay..."

"The Impediment Jinx!"

"That just slows you down," Lisa said.

"Actually, that's what the rest of time sees. To the victim, they are moving through time normally and everything else has sped up! They are moving through time at a different rate than the rest of us just as we are moving through time at a different rate than they are. The same is true for the Petrification Charm – any kind of magical petrification really – and Stasis Charms. For the target, time stops! Once the charm wears off or is cancelled it resumes for them exactly at the point where it stopped. By my calculations, I was 4,980 days old when I was petrified near the end of second year and was beginning to gasp. Twenty-two days later when Madam Pomfrey revived me, I finished that gasp. I was still exactly 4,980 days old. Those twenty-two days never happened for me because I was outside of that time.

"The time magic is called time manipulation, although I think that is misleading. If I can't truly change the past with a time turner, if all I can do is participate in what already happened in a different way, I'm not manipulating time itself, just my perception of and participation in time. The same is true for slowing time. I can't slow time, only a person or objects perception of and participation in time at large. In other words, magic can't change time! But, we can manipulate our time in some ways as already discussed. This brings us to another time magic that was in that book I was given Second Year. One can also accelerate their time, in other words their time becomes faster than normal time. There is no charm or hex that does this – or if there is, the book said nothing about it. But it did say one can create a ward that does just that. You can ward a room or a building in such a way that anything within that room lives life at a faster rate

than the rest of the universe. Once I ruled out Time Turners, and given that Harry and I have unrestricted access to the library because of this silly tournament, I searched the Restricted Section for books on Warding and found a book that tells you how to set up what is called a Time Compression Ward. You can only use it on rooms – like stasis wards in potions pantries – or on the inside of a building, or out beyond the building by about thirty feet or so. Can't do it outside beyond that, apparently. The book says they're too many variables. And it has drawbacks, but it would give us loads of time to train. I knew I couldn't use just a classroom and didn't really think about it until I found this place."

"And what would this ward do?" Susan asked.

"And what are the drawbacks?" Daphne added.

"With the ward active, for those of us inside the warded space, we wouldn't notice a thing. Our watches and everything would seem to move forward at the same speed as always. But, time outside would be moving much more slowly. An hour to us would only be a minute of real time. Actually, you can make it go even faster. With enough ambient magic to draw upon, much, much faster. Back in January, I managed to set up a temporary Ward on the classroom Harry and I were using and a stop watch on either side of the ward. I spent four hours under Compression, and then checked the outside watch. Only twenty seconds had passed! That means, for every minute outside, twelve hours pass inside. An outside hour equals thirty days inside."

"Bloody hell! You could get years of training in like that!" Ginny said.  
"And all of it before the next task!"

"That's the advantage," Hermione nodded. "Now ask me why I didn't do it? Why was that classroom inadequate?"

"You age at the accelerated rate," Katie said.

"That's one of the drawbacks. If you spend years under time compression, you literally and physically are years older. But, as I already mentioned, you are not legally any older. The other drawback is that if you really want to spend more than a few hours at a time under compression, you have to think about your bodily needs. You have to eat, use the loo, sleep and the longer your time,

the more stuff you need and it all has to be in there with you. If you want to spend a month straight under time compression – which would only be an hour outside – you need to have all the food, clothes, potions – heck even bog rolls, feminine products, everything you would need to live one month in complete isolation from the outside world. It all has to be in the warded space before you start the Compression. The longer you spend and the more people you bring in, the more stuff you need in storage within the warded space before you begin. Basically, the more time you spend in such a ward, the more space you need for storage and other needs."

"And I take it you were not thinking of a few fast hours here and there?" Padma asked.

"That would be no different than what I was doing with the Time Turner," Hermione nodded. "Even if we ate more than normal, sleep deprivation would set in. Originally, I was thinking not less than about fifteen minutes real time every other day or so, maybe more. That would be about one week under Compression per session. But, while that would be great for Harry training – even for Neville training – the problems that came up last week would still be an issue. Even though doing that we could, in theory, rapidly move through a pregnancy, it would be noticed. My thought is now months at one go – hours in here! And, that means even more of a supply problem than before, especially as we're talking Harry, Neville and at least eight of us if not more. That's loads and loads and loads of food, standard potions, potions ingredients and who knows what else. And, unless I'm mistaken, it's not free and I'm pretty sure someone would notice if we just nicked it."

"And I doubt there's enough here at Hogwarts anyway if we're talking loads of people over months," Lucinda added. "Not to mention the storage. Even with an expansion charm and shrinking everything – and some things can't be shrunk and still work right – I doubt this room would be large enough for even four people over more than a month or so. That and it has no bathrooms. It'd get pretty ripe, pretty fast."

"Space may not be an issue, but it does need a lot of work," Hermione said. The others gave her doubtful looks. "The ward is rune based. I inscribe runes on a door or door frame that leads outside what I define as the warded space. I then open any doors that lead into rooms I want in the warded space and close any other

doors or windows that lead outside what I want as the warded space. If there are stairs without doors or such, I place separate runes to limit the space. I then activate the ward for about an hour of ward time and it permanently defines the area to be warded – or at least until I were to redo the wards. Everything inside would be subject to Time Compression when the wards activate and nothing outside would be affected."

"Still," Lucinda said, "I'm not sure even this corridor is large enough."

"This corridor is a dead end," Hermione said. "I explored it a few weekends ago, just after the Second Task. This wing juts out on a rock or some such. Three sides of it are surrounded by cliffs leading down to the Black lake. Only one side is connected to the castle at all! Not only that, but that door we entered is the only one in. There may have been others at one time, but they are all sealed off. There are some balconies, but they don't connect to the castle and I could include them in the ward scheme. We're not taking this room, or this corridor. I'm taking about the entire wing! It's probably much larger than all the other dorms combined in total area – probably much larger. And it has its own stair wells. There's a total of seven floors and an attic like space. Space is not the issue."

"It needs a lot of work," Parvati said. "I mean it's so – primitive."

Hermione nodded. "Fortunately, I know a couple of House Elves that are willing to help."

"What? Hermione Granger wants to use the oppressed House Elves?"

"I had a long discussion with one and learned that while my intention was probably in the right place – I still don't think we should abuse them or even take them for granted – my methods and understanding of them and their plight was totally wrong. I just want them treated with respect, really."

"Not all families who have House Elves are like the Malfoys," Daphne said. "I assume it was that Dobby who got you going?"

"And another elf named Winky who was given clothes because her Master felt she had embarrassed him. I was there when it happened

and he took nothing else into consideration except appearances, not even what really happened."

"I wouldn't give my Tarla clothes for all the gold in Gringotts," Susan said. "She's been my friend for as long as I can remember."

Hermione looked surprised.

"Most old wizarding families have elves," Susan said. "Some are vile to them, particularly the darker ones. But our elves are a small clan that has been with our family for over a thousand years. Their children are raised with us and later help raise our children and so on. In reality, the true old families would sooner disown their own child than cast out their elves."

Hermione noted several nods, most notably the two girls from Beauxbatons, the four from Slytherin and Hannah.

Hermione looked at Ginny.

"My family lost its elves a long time ago," she said sadly. "We used to be rather well off, but something happened and we lost almost everything. All we have left is the Burrow and the surrounding land, and that was a pig farm back before we lost it all. We owned the land and rented it to Muggles until we had nowhere else to live."

"We could get our elves to help," Daphne said. "I'd guess most of us have one elf assigned to us and they are ours when we need them." The other girls who had nodded, nodded in agreement. "Technically we're not supposed to have them here, but that rule means they can't be in our dorms or be used in a way to get around any rules a person without an elf would not be able to. Even if – er – stealing and entire wing is against the rules (and McGonagall never told you what space you could use in preparing for the tournament or how much or how little, just that it could not be in use for any other purpose, like this whole wing), you warded it off without an elf, therefore having elves as accessories after the fact would not be breaking those rules."

"Even with elves," Lucinda said, "if we're going to do the whole wing, what with furnishings and all and to make it useable for training and living, that could take months."



"Which we have, thanks to the wards," Hermione said. "But where do we get the stuff?"

"Think like a witch," Susan said. "We can't magic food, potions ingredients and some things, but furniture, wall hangings, stuff like that? What we can't conjure – or what our elves can't conjure – we can transfigure – or at least our elves can. And, as long as it is and inanimate object into an inanimate object of sufficiently similar mass and we're not talking about real jewels or precious metals, it would be permanent. We could make this place look like a palace if we were so inclined."

"Right then," Lucinda said, "Renovations not a problem. We'll get to the stuff we can't magic. First, assuming we can get most everything we'd need, had you thought about exactly how you were going to use this place? How many people? When? How long under time compression? That's what we need to know before we can even talk provisioning."

Hermione nodded. "I warded this place yesterday and spent a full day here under Compression to make sure it worked. Winky brought the food for me and there is a loo on this floor and she made a camp bed. Anyway, in addition to exploring, I also worked out a general idea.

"First, I figure the best time to really use this place both for training Harry and Neville and for Lucinda's plan is during the Spring Holiday which begins a week from Wednesday. As long as no one is causing mayhem, the staff usually is lax about many of the rules except being caught out of your dorms at night. A fair bit of the students will be gone, especially after having been here over the Christmas Hols. I won't be because the only way to go home for me as a Muggle Born is on the Express and I'm not spending two days on that train!" The other Muggle Borns nodded. "Anyone here planning on going home?"

The fifth years were all staying because they wanted to revise for their O.W.L.s. Oddly, the others were staying as well. The Beauxbatons students were staying because no one had worked out how to get them to and from France for the hols in advance. The others either wanted to stay here with their friends – who were mostly in this room – or because their families were busy or had other plans.

"Right then," Hermione said. "First of all, we all need three months to purge the contraceptive potion – at least those of us who are going to be with Harry or Neville. I'm due for my next dose on Monday. I figure if we do an hour a day in here for at least the last three days before the hols, we should all be clear of it unless you are scheduled to see Madam Pomfrey on the 27th or 28th."

"And if that's the case, we could just nick or cook up a purgative potion," Lucinda said. "Makes you violently ill for several hours, but it will flush all the potions out of your system."

Hermione nodded. She had not thought of that. "Right then. March 29th is the first day of the Hols. Fitting if you think about it. Anyway, my thinking was that those of us who are going to be the 'wives' would each spend one hour in real time – one month under compression – with Harry or Neville, not all at once but one at a time. How we get them to agree to this I have no idea, but assuming that we do, that would allow us ample opportunity to both get – er – comfortable with them and pregnant. Also, we'll come up with a training schedule for them so that the month is more than just a – er – well, so that at least some of the time is productive for them in a – er – well, not sexual way. Since we can leave the school, I figured on Thursday, we'd head to Diagon Alley by floo from Hogsmeade and go to Gringotts to do the paperwork for the wives and then any shopping we need to do. I also penciled in Friday for more shopping if needed. Saturday is the big one. All of us wives – and anyone else – would be here for several months Compression. Long enough for us to get through our pregnancies and that our babies would be too old to be placed out for adoption."

"Means at least four months of age," Lucinda said. "And that age is measured by their developmental age, not birth date. They do some kind of test. But do you really want to go through a pregnancy without a Healer? What if something happens?"

"I know," Hermione conceded. "Short of tricking Madam Pomfrey to join us, I haven't thought that one all the way through. Good thing I have more time."

"My parents are Healers," Lisa said. "That, and I think a lot of the magical parents could help us. It would be a Saturday, after all and they would be free to visit us. We just don't tell them why."

"That's so Slytherin," Tracy chuckled. "But it would be a good idea. It would probably save us the embarrassment of a Howler the next week. After all, they would already have spent months and months with us and all."

"Assuming they didn't kill Harry or Neville on sight," Ginny added. "I'm not about to ask Mum to come."

Hermione nodded. "Okay then, but I think each of us who is doing this should decide whether to invite their parents or not. They are going to find out anyway and personally I'd rather them find out before Dumbledore does. They won't be happy with me, but I'm sure in the end they'll stand by me if Dumbledore tried to use them against me."

"If we go that far, anyone else?" Susan asked. "Maybe we can also trick some of the faculty? I mean we could well be through fifth year with all that time."

"NOT SNAPE!" several voices said, including the Slytherins.

"If we need a potions master," Tracy said, "my Mum is one."

They eventually agreed on no Snape. If Lisa's parents came, there would be no need for Madam Pomfrey and she might be needed if something happened outside. They decided on the other three Heads of House and Professors Vector and Babbling because Hermione wanted Harry to at least begin to learn Arithmancy and Runes just in case it was needed on the last task.

"Right," Hermione said. "Now, if we do this we need to know who among us is considering becoming a wife. That will decide the number of parents and such and all of which we need to know before we even begin talking about supplies. I am not asking you to make your final decision. I'd just rather have too much in storage than too little, assuming we can get what we need. My thinking is, you're not stuck as a wife until your month with Harry or Neville and maybe not even then. You're not being forced to do this. But, if you say 'no' today, your family cannot be on the – er – guest list. All who are thinking of being either Harry or Neville's wife raise your hands."

To Hermione's surprise, everyone did.

"I hope most of you aren't going for Harry. That really wouldn't be fair to him..."

"Or to you or Hannah or Gabrielle," Lucinda said. "Speaking for Slytherin, we've already decided. Tracey and I pick Neville. Rosie and Daphne are with Harry." The other three nodded in agreement.

"We had a House Meeting too," Susan said. "Hannah and I already know because of our contracts. Marcia picked Harry and Andrea, not wanting so much excitement in her life, picked Neville."

"We didn't invite you or Ginny to our meeting," Katie said. "It was short. Parv said she's be okay with either one as would her sister Padma, so it was my call and of course I go with my teammate!"

"Which means I'm with Neville and Pad's with Harry," Parvati said.

"I've been friends of a sort with Neville for two years," Lisa said, "and he's been tutoring Laura in Herbology so she already knows him and likes him."

"Luna?" Hermione asked in disbelief.

"The nargles are less active around Harry," she said, "so it's Harry."

"Michelle?"

"I'm also not into excitement. Dragons were more than enough. Neville."

Hermione had been looking at her list. She now noticed that Harry and Neville each – assuming no one backed out – had the same number of Fifth Years, Fourth Years and Third Years in their prospective family. Each had a Prefect. Each had the same number of Purebloods, Half-bloods and Muggle Borns and the same number from each Hogwarts House and Beaubatons. From an Arithmancy standpoint, that amounted to potentially significant magical statistics.

They then worked out a tentative list of others. Ginny was not inviting her Mum, which also meant she wouldn't invite her Dad as Mrs. Weasley would insist on coming. Then again, Ron was going home and that was fine with Ginny and he was not likely to want to

come back early which meant one of her parents had to remain to keep an eye on him and the other two boys. She felt maybe she could ... manipulate the situation a bit. Her Mum was the major concern after all. Bill was coming to visit her, Fred and George at Hogwarts that weekend, so she figured Bill was okay, but that meant she probably had to include Fred, George and Angelina and Alicia as they were secretly dating and besides, those girls could keep the notorious pranksters in line most of the time.

For Hannah, it would be her Mum and a family called the "Tonks" who were all planning to visit her that weekend. Susan was also expecting to see her Aunt as well as a Madam Marchbanks who was an old and close family friend. For Marcia and Angela, if their parents came, they would have to include their younger brother and sister respectively who were both First Year Puffs.

For the Ravenclaws, Luna's Dad would come if asked. Much as the Patils were worried about their father, they felt it best to include their parents as potentials. Laura Caldwell had a younger brother in Second Year, so he had to be included even though she thought he was a "little toerag." Katie had a younger sister in Gryffindor, who was a Second Year so she had to be included as well. Daphne and Tracy also had a sibling in a lower year. Tracy's brother was a Second Year Claw and Daphne's sister a second year Snake. Lucinda and Rosie were only children as was Michelle from Beauxbatons.

Gabrielle really through in a wrinkle. If her parents came from France, that meant Fleur had to be included. As she was a Champion, that meant the other two Champions needed to be invited because even if they were not part of the Harry training, they would have grounds to complain when it all came out. She suggested that the other two bring dates. Fleur was not dating, but to have two older boys stuck for months on end in such a shallow to non-existent dating pool with Fleur around could not be a good idea.

Hermione included the names with the five potential faculty members. She also included her parents as potentials and Neville's Gran and Sirius and Remus. This was just a potential list, but it would define their requirements.

Hermione looked at her list. "Right, that means in addition to Harry, Neville and us, we need quarters for fifteen other students and forty

adults. Figure fourteen of the adult quarters are for couples, that would leave one spare just in case, and sixteen singles and single rooms for the other seven boys and eight girls. It means rations for seventy-five people for the entire weekend Compression – I'm figuring fifteen months Compression to be safe and rations for four people for nine months total for Wednesday as that will be one month for each of the – er – couples. We should also stock baby food, I suppose. I mean, I guess we could – er – breast feed the babies the whole time, but again, just in case for whatever reason. Then there's the time between now and then as at least some of us will undergo Compression to work on the renovation. To be safe, let's say six of us a day nine days, at one Month per day and all of us for one day – Tuesday night – for whatever needs to be done and to make sure the potions are out of the system."

"And to brew fertility potions," Lucinda said. "Simple enough to brew. But it's not in stock here so we can't nick it and it's illegal for any apothecary to send it here. Just 'cause we are not on birth control doesn't mean we'll get knocked up in one month. That potion makes it all but certain that we will. One dose each when we start our month in here should do although a few more won't hurt."

"Side effects?" Hermione asked. She was not familiar with those potions.

Lucinda shrugged. "Most women report being randy as hell, especially at the time of the month where conception is most likely. Otherwise, there is a slightly increased chance of fraternal twins – the not identical kind."

Hermione nodded.

"Don't forget the elves," Susan said. "They don't eat as much as we do, but they still eat."

"How many?" It turned out that if Neville had an elf involved, it would be fourteen elves total. Hermione then hung her head. "Well, it was a nice idea."

"What?" a voice asked.

"Even with just us and the elves, this is going to be an awful lot of food alone. We could be talking literally tons of it. With expansion

charms and shrinking charms, storage is not an issue. Stasis charms would keep it from spoiling and all that is fairly straight forward. But there is no way we can afford this! None! It'd cost a bloody fortune!"

SATURDAY, MARCH 18, 1995

"What will cost a fortune?" Daphne asked.

"The food alone!" Hermione replied. "Then there's the potion ingredients. I was thinking of getting those two up to speed in potions through the end of this year during the first day Compression among other things, but that's a lot of ingredients we would need."

"There's way more than enough in the School's open locker," Lucinda said.

"What?"

"Doesn't your Common Room have an attached Potions lab so you can practice?"

"Not that I know of," Hermione said.

"It does," Ginny said. "Aside from Fred and George, no one uses it. I guess everyone assumes it's not allowed."

"It's in the rules," Daphne began. "Any student may brew year appropriate potions in their dorm lab for practice. Snape tells us all that at the beginning of First Year. Although, it does say that the lab's use is at the discretion of the Head of each House and the Potion's Master."

"Who probably said the rest of us can't," Susan growled.

"Anyway, there's an open locker so you can get whatever ingredients you need. So long as it's not a restricted ingredient which you only use for N.E.W.T. levels, anyone can access them and there's loads and loads of them."

"Probably because they buy enough for the whole school," Hermione said.

Daphne could only shrug.

"And the ingredients for the Fertility Potion are not restricted ones," Lucinda said. "Basically, as long as we're talking those ingredients, they're ours for the taking – literally. Now if we move to more



advanced stuff, that's another matter as none of us are N.E.W.T.s yet. But we don't even need to worry about that until the Holiday, by which time we're all married, emancipated and have unrestricted access to our personal vaults. Basically, I doubt there's anything we'll need to buy until after that Wednesday."

"What about food?" Hermione asked. "Bog rolls? Those sort of things?"

"You can get forty-eight bog rolls for a Galleon. I've got over a hundred Galleons left from my personal spending fund alone. That's forty-eight hundred rolls. If I called my elf here, I could have them here in a couple of hours."

"I couldn't ask you to..."

"An odd purchase, but you must admit it's for a good cause," Lucinda shrugged.

"Well, I'm sure the food will cost a lot more than a hundred Galleons."

"You eat caviar and truffles and the like with every meal, Hermione?" Daphne asked somewhat jokingly.

"Of course not!"

"You don't pay for food."

"What? Okay I know it's part of our tuition but..."

"Aside from luxury foods and certain rare imports, no one living in the magical world pays for food!"

"But the restaurants in Diagon Alley," Hermione began, "the Three Brooksticks? Honeydukes? I've even seen a bakery! You have to pay there!"

"You're paying for the service," Daphne said. "You're paying for someone else to cook it. The basic ingredients are free in our world."

"That makes no sense! You can't conjure food! That's a fundamental law of transfiguration!"

"You're correct. Food cannot be made magically. You can summon it. If you have it, you can transfigure it into something similar, but that's it. Where does food come from?"

"Farms!"

"Unless it's fish," Luna said.

"Then it's caught."

Daphne shook her head. "I'm sure you've thought of this, but they really should teach people how the magical world works. I'd bet even a fair few Purebloods have no clue and they really should. Let me ask you this: how many students from magical families do you know whose parents are farmers – not gardeners, farmers or fishermen for that matter?"

"Um ... none?"

"There might be the odd eccentric out there," Daphne conceded, "but that's right. A farm is hard to hide from Muggles. That and many magicals consider such things beneath their abilities. Magical plants and animals are another thing, of course. But we generally don't eat those. All of the food we eat comes from the Muggle World, or at least that's where we get all the ingredients."

"Wait! We get most all if not all our food from the Muggle World and yet we don't have to pay for it? You're not saying we steal it, are you?"

"I won't say it never happens," Daphne said. "I won't say there's some wizard out there who won't nick a Sheppard's pie left unattended, but no, we don't steal our food. However there was a time a few hundred years ago when we did, at least to a large extent."

"Why?"

"First of all, and I know how much you like to do well in class, but if you want to know the truth or at least what is more likely the truth, forget almost everything we've learned in History of Magic. That stuff is Pureblood rubbish of almost the worst sort and is mostly a self

serving pack of half truths and lies. Having said that, and unlike what Binns teaches, until about the Fifth Century A.D. the magical world and Muggle World got along about as well as any collection of peoples. We've never been numerous. Even today and including Muggle Borns, there's only about one of us for every thousand Muggles and, for the most part, that ratio is normal. In ancient times, we served as priests and priestesses – for those religions focused on nature and the stars which we were believed to have a certain affinity for. We were also scribes, as in the dawn of writing that was considered a magical art. We were craftsmen, mostly working in metals and woodworking. We were counselors and teachers of wisdom, mainly due to our much longer lives. We kept the oral histories. And we were healers and teachers.

"Not all of us mind you. There always have been evil witches and wizards. And we were to keep them in line as well. Moreover, before Hogwarts, just being magical did not mean you became trained at all. You needed to be chosen as an apprentice or the like. We did not farm. There were far too few of us and we were spread out far too much to make a go of it, unless we wished to be totally subject to Muggle authority (as magicals who did not own land or farm, we were paid in food – if money was scarce – or money and generally were exempted from taxation.) There were those who became wealthy, usually as warrior-wizards during successful campaigns where the looting was particularly lucrative. But mostly we lived lives better than most our Muggle neighbors, but not at the absolute top.

"This, as I said, began to change in the Fifth Century."

"Christianity," Hermione nodded.

"Actually no. There was the odd cleric here or there, but the Church itself was one of the last to give us organized trouble. Not, it was the fall of the Western Roman Empire and the economic and political chaos that followed. A region hard pressed by invaders or their pillaging might blame their fate on magic and hunt for magicals to kill. A victorious warlord would want to get rid of the local magicals so they could be replaced by those loyal to him. Every once in a while, some catastrophe might be blamed on the works of Satan or a local cleric might want to stamp out whatever was left of the pre-Christian religion. But these pogroms were always fairly local and, after a while, not too effective. After all, once the witch or wizard you did know either got killed or fled, it's not like the new one was about to

stick his head up too much. Fortunately, there was a lively black market even in the worst of those bad times that allowed our people to make some living, although that was also when we began our on again, off again association with the Goblins and seeking fortunes Muggle could not – unless they found out and they'd then kill us just for the gold. We were really persecuted when it was politically expedient for the Muggles, or when there was gold or such to rob.

"Now, one of the things we were often accused of was using magic to destroy crops and livestock. I won't say that never happened. There were Dark Wizards who did that from time to time. I will say, if things got bad for the local magicals, they might turn to stealing food which they could do far more easily and with less risk of capture than Muggles. On paper, it should not have been too big a deal. It should not have resulted in tens of thousands or more deaths over the centuries. After all we're outnumbered a thousand to one. If I went to a field and took one shaft of wheat for every thousand standing, that would be my share in an equitable distribution and the farmer would never know there was a loss. If I stole one sheep out of a thousand, same thing. Except, it's not easy to do that. A whole field would disappear or a whole flock. That wheat and mutton may well feed a lot of magicals for a year, but the loss is hardly unnoticeable. Until things really got bad, if we caught you stealing crops, we accused you of sorcery, bore witness and left you to your fate with the local Lord.

"It all started coming apart for good in the Fourteenth Century. What had been isolated witch hunts would grow into the Muggle equivalent of Quidditch. Again, the underlying cause was economic now coupled with true fear. In the early part of that century, the weather changed for the worse throughout much of Europe and no we didn't do it! Crops failed almost every year after several centuries of large harvests. Famine affects everyone, us included. At the same time, the Kings and Lords were consolidating power and war was becoming both constant and ruinous to all. Widespread famine was averted only because the Black Death wiped out a third of the mouths in need of feeding. We fared better than the Muggles, but not by much. They estimate that by the end of the century, the total depopulation was around fifty-percent. Ours was about half of that. Naturally, who are the Muggle going to blame? If there weren't any Jewish communities conveniently close by, it had to be witchcraft! Admittedly by then we were much better at hiding than we were centuries earlier, but now even our black market economy with the

Muggles was falling apart. It was only at this late date that the Roman Church declared witchcraft was per se heresy and witch persecution received a church wide blessing of sorts."

"Of sorts?"

"The Muggle masses were out for blood. The Church was out for souls. Even if they caught a real witch, if she confessed and sought absolution, they might let her off. Even if not, the catchers wanted to see a good burning that day. Church law was never expedient and if the burning did occur it might be months or even years later (things were so much quicker before when it was just a rogue cleric who did not have to consult with Rome or the Inquisition about such things.) A real witch fearing capture was more likely to turn herself over to the slow working Church than the fast working local authorities as there was more chance of escape."

"But didn't the Church torture?"

"Everyone did then. Either way you'd be in for it. With the Church, however, it was not over once you confessed. With the locals, your next visitor would probably be your executioner. With the Church, it was some higher up and if you recanted, they'd actually do something almost like a real investigation and trial. That's why it took so long."

"The Protestant Reformation was an even bigger disaster."

"Why?"

"They made the Roman Catholic Church look like cute little kittens. They adopted a book written by a couple of Catholic priests who had been in the Roman Inquisition. The two men had left to teach or study at a university and requested permission to write the guidebook on unveiling and dealing with heretics. Both the University and Bishop thought they meant Protestants so when they submitted a book on witch hunting for pre-publication approval, one which openly defied accepted practice and church law, they were told no. They submitted it higher in the chain and were told no. They then forged an approval, sent it to publication and were caught. They were excommunicated and convicted of heresy, and the Pope himself banned the book as a work of heresy the mere possession of which could result in excommunication. It had such wonderful

ways of proving a woman was a witch such as if she had any warts or blemishes on her skin or a black cat or cursed at her husband. The Protestants – or at least enough of them – who could care less what the Pope said, loved it.

"The result was we had to find a creative way to get food as any connection with Muggles was potentially deadly. Food brokers (always from Muggle Born lines who kept a Muggle like existence) came into being and were able to buy food for resale in places like Diagon Alley. Of course, it was much more expensive than before, so less scrupulous brokers simply stole the food to undercut the competition, feeding the fires as it were. The economic crisis fomented the worst anti-magic campaigns ever and triggered the Conference which led to the Statute of Secrecy. One of that convention's key provisions was that each signing power had to ensure no magical had cause to steal crops, livestock, flour or such from Muggles again.

"The Ministry of Magic did not exist before 1692 and our ratification of the Statute of Secrecy. Its sole Charter then was to enforce that Statute. However, Magical Law Enforcement was not the first Department formed. The first was the Department of Tariffs, Trade and Revenue. Could have caused an uproar, but everyone knew it was that or we could cease to exist. We magicals had no formal system of taxation before. Basically, whatever money the Wizengamot had to play with came from fines or fees of various kinds, which were not constant and seldom a lot. Immediately after taxes started coming in, the Department of Economic Affairs began operations. Although it does more now, as does the Ministry, its job was to buy as much food as was needed to support the magical population. Food was 'rationed' then to prevent hoarding, but within a couple of years, even the poorest Hedge Witch had no need to steal food. Thanks to Stasis Charms, the Ministry has always bought as much as it can based upon the budget – which is always more than it absolutely needs – and food availability. Magical Britain weathered the Irish Potato famine (as Irish magicals were affected by it although not nearly as much as the Muggles) and the shortages of the Muggle World Wars because we had built up huge stockpiles. It's not uncommon these days for families to keep a year's supply of food just in case, assuming they have room."

"And we can get all we need?" Hermione asked in disbelief.

"Probably not in one day," Lucinda said. "By my calculations, including elves we need a total of about 130,000 rations for your renovation, our Harry and Neville time and the fifteen months with guests. That's less than a day's supply for the country which, unless bought all at once, won't even raise an eyebrow in all likelihood. If we get the elves started on that, say, today? They will be doing the menus and such, then I'd say we get 13,000 rations a day from now until we start the Spring Holiday. With all our elves involved, that's less than a thousand per elf per day or food for a family of four for two and a half months or so, which really would not look odd at all."

Hermione shook her head. "A government doling out food?"

"Remember, that does not include what the DEA considers luxury items. There's a couple of specialty shops that sell those. But, what we normally eat here – some of the French dishes might have had some regulated ingredients in them – that's all government issue," Daphne said. "This isn't the Muggle world. Magic is free after all. We aren't paying for a military or roads or public improvements or stuff like that. Things like the Floo don't cost us anything to set up or maintain. That's actually a money maker as there's a small annual fee to maintain a general connection and a decent warder can set up a dedicated connection between two locations at no cost to them or the government. Food purchases account for about half of the budget. Aside from the salaries for the Ministry employees, about the only other major expenditure is St. Mungos, and about half its budget and almost all of Hogwarts is from donations by the very wealthy to cut down their taxes."

"The current system which has been working for over 300 years probably saved us from oblivion. In 1692, most witches and wizards who remained in this world were dirt poor. There were few jobs because there was little money. Food was expensive. Olivander's sold wands, as always, but if it weren't for some sympathetic old families who had money, aside from Muggle Borns, few families could afford a wand for their child. You didn't buy course books unless you were both rich and showing off. You didn't buy much of anything except for your wand. My family journal talks about using cauldrons that were probably old and dodgy when Hogwarts was founded. Hogwarts was about the only thing magical Britain had to brag about and, even with the witch hunts in the Americas, a Hogwarts student would more likely than not be on the next boat heading that way when he finished. Most of Diagon Alley was not

even shops, just cheap slums. Within a hundred years it was the thriving Alley we know – although not all the shops are the same. Jobs were plentiful and paid better than ever. Everyone was making money if they wanted to and were willing to work."

Hermione shook her head. "They really should teach this stuff."

Tracy nodded. "Gits like Malfoy might then learn we mess with Muggles at the risk of everything even if they do nothing! The Muggles call the period from the Fall of the Western Roman Empire through about the reign of Charlemagne as the 'Dark Ages.' It was a period of economic and political turmoil and intellectual stagnation or decline. For us, I'd say that began around 1350 and continued until about 1750. Magic was lost, forgotten and certainly not advanced much during that time. There were exceptions. But more magic has been invented since then than had been since the beginning of Hogwarts up to that point. Back then, people were too busy trying to buy bread or keep a hold on what their ancestors had made to worry about such things. The Malfoys were among those too busy trying to buy bread."

"Had the Death Eaters gotten closer to success," Daphne said, "it would have ruined us all."

"Okay," Lucinda said, "we've seemed to solve the issues of time, food, potions ingredients – er – guest lists and bog rolls. Anything else on your list?"

"Books. Not just course books but anything we can think of that might be useful. I'd rather not have no library."

"Guess that puts Flourish & Blotts on the must shop list," Ginny chuckled.

"We could also get the elves to help us copy," Daphne said.

"Copy?"

"We find books in the Library or remember some that were useful and get one of our elves to copy it. They conjure a blank and somehow can copy the real thing."



"Really useful for restricted books," Daphne said, "not that I've done that."

"But isn't that illegal?"

"Only if the writer is alive and you try and sell it. I hear Muggle laws are different."

"And school rules?"

"Like we care at this point?"

Hermione shrugged.

"We could also see about books in our family collections – aside from family magics of course," Susan added.

"Anything else?" There were more things. Hermione and the others than discussed what kinds of rooms they might want, what things they thought Harry and Neville could or should learn and anything else that came to mind.

TUESDAY, MARCH 28th 1995

Hermione sat in a comfortable chair in the Library of the wing they now called the Clubhouse. There was a book in her hands and a few of the others were in the Library as well reading. Hermione only looked like she was reading. They had five days left before the Time Compression ended and they could 'go back to Hogwarts' as had become the expression. It was the first time since they started this project that they had so much down time as it was finally mostly complete, although Hermione still thought there were things that could be done here and there as did many if not all of the others.

When she first thought up the use of Time Compression and even though she had planned to use most if not all of the Wing, she figured it would not take all that long to reconfigure the floors as they wanted once Dobby and Winky were helping. Yet even with fourteen House Elves and eighteen young witches, it had been a lot harder and slower work than she had thought. She planned for ten hours of time Compression, one hour each day starting on the twenty-first and running through today with one day where they would not need to be here at all. She also figured that maybe aside from the first and

last day of the project, they didn't all need to be here every day. She was mistaken. Magic can do a lot of amazing things and the Clubhouse was just that, but it can still take a lot of work and time.

That first Sunday, the group of them entered Time Compression right after lunch. Thirty days compressed time later, their hopes of being able to return and not sleep on camp beds or eat camp rations were unfulfilled. It took two weeks just to sort through all the junk deciding what could be reused and what would be material for transfiguration. It was only after they had finished that that they could even begin to get the wing ready to being any renovations. Of course, at least by then they had agreed on a lot of possibilities for their finished project.

When she first thought of this, she thought it would be a simple matter of turning an existing room into another use. Naturally, it was not that simple. She also thought with elves it would be a snap. Again, it was easier – the fact was it could have taken years in Compressed Time to do it otherwise given that the elves knew the magic and they did not. But it was still a lot of work. It may have been easier if the elves – or even many of them – had done this before. Only Dobby had and that was as a worker. But as odd as Dobby was, he was also very, very smart and observant in Hermione's opinion. Years ago, he had been one of the elf workers on a major renovation of Malfoy Manor. The renovation was headed by a team of Goblins as many such renovations were. But Dobby had paid attention. As such, thankfully and by default, Dobby was for all practical purposes the Foreman and the girls' "expert" on the project and redesign.

Hermione's plan was to renovate one floor at a time. Dobby agreed that was best. Hermione's plan was to clean the floor, renovate it and then move on starting with living spaces and moving from there. Dobby disagreed. Dobby suggested they picked the floor they would renovate last (one of the Guest Floors), move the junk from that floor out, gut it, move all the junk from all the floors into it, sort it, then gut the rest of the wing all the while working on the details of the renovation plan. He then suggested the storage and kitchens be the first, as they would be on camp rations until the kitchen was up and running and they could not even hope to bring in regular food stores until there were storeroom. Then they could renovate the other Guest floor so the Girls could have real beds instead of camp beds

and some semblance of privacy before moving on to the rest of the wing. They went with Dobby's plan.

The Wing was like a long finger extending from the south wall of the castle on a rocky peninsula out into the Black Lake. The end of the wing that attached to the castle which was the northern most point in the Wing they called "Hogwart's Side." The southernmost end they called "Lake Side" and there the two side walls bent in upon each other forming a round, half circle wall. They called that part, the round end of the Wing, the "Roundel."

The Wing's dungeons had no windows. This was where they planned to put the storerooms and Kitchens and that plan did not change. It was actually at the same level as the Castle's Ground Floor, which was where the main entrance to the Castle was, the entrance to the stair leading to Dumbledore's office, the Hogwarts Kitchens and entrance to Hufflepuff House, and the Defense Against the Dark Arts Classroom. (The "real" dungeons held Slytherin House and their Potions class.) If there had been a doorway to the Castle, it was long since bricked over and they had searched for it.

The Wing's "Ground Floor" was even with the Castle's First Floor. In the Castle, this was where the Great Hall was located as well as the Transfiguration and History of Magic Classrooms. This floor would be their educational and training floor and again there was no connection to the rest of the Castle.

The only connection was from a corridor on the Second Floor of the Castle, the Wing's First Floor. The Girls had taken to calling this "The Floor With The Door" or "The Main Floor". This was where they had been meeting and where they lived all through the first Compression time. In the Castle, it was the same floor as Moaning Myrtle's Bathroom and the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets, the Charms Class Room and the Arithmancy Classroom. A balcony some twenty feet wide extended out from the Roundel on the Lake Side.

The Wing's Second floor would become House Potter private apartments. It too had a balcony extending out from the Roundel, as did all of the floors above it, although this one was only ten feet in width. It was actually even with the school's third floor which held the corridor where Fluffy had guarded the trap door leading to the hiding place of the Philosopher's Stone, the bathroom where Hermione had

nearly been killed by a troll, the Hospital Wing and the Ancient Runes Classroom.

In the rest of Hogwarts, the Fourth Floor was where one found the Muggle Studies classroom and the entrance to Ravenclaw tower. For the Wing, this was their Third Floor which would become Longbottom Apartments. The Hogwarts Fifth Floor had the entrance to Gryffindor Tower and the Prefect's Bathroom. In the Wing, at first this was their junk room, although it would become guest rooms. The Hogwarts Sixth Floor had the Astronomy Classroom and the trapdoor leading to Divination. This was the second guest wing in the Club House and the highest floor in the wing. Hogwarts' Seventh Floor held rooms for a few of the school clubs and, Hermione now knew, the Room of Requirement. For the Wing, this was the attic and would become "Neville's Greenhouse."

The past several days or months had been an education, even if it was not one Hermione expected. When she first came to Hogwarts, she had never heard about House Elves. She first heard about them Second Year as Harry claimed there was a House Elf trying to get him to leave school. She had never really looked into them after that, nor thought about them until the end of the previous summer when she saw the summary dismissal of Winky. As she now knew, she "went Muggle" and applied non-magical ideas and standards to a purely magical situation: namely their plight and working conditions. Now, she "owned" a House Elf and was not the least bit concerned for she knew Winky was well treated and happy.

Now she had also learned about magical construction. She had read about it somewhat absently in *Hogwarts: A History*. The construction of Hogwarts Castle was the subject of the sixth chapter; the first five dealing with the lives of the Founders before Hogwarts and how they came together and why they decided to build "the world's first" formal school of magic. To be honest, even though it was magical, construction was too "normal" and lacked the legendary feel of the rest of the book. She was more interested in the fact that Goblins had been a major part of the work force than how it was actually built.

The Castle (and presumably this Wing) was completed around 950 A.D. Aside from the current Great Hall (built in 1410), Greenhouses (1578 – 1867), and Quidditch Pitch, (1710) and the specific uses of the interior spaces, there had been no significant changes to the

appearance or lay out of the structure since it first opened. She knew magic was used to build it, but upon a re-reading (she brought this and a few other books to read when she had time off), she realized she had glossed over many details. Then again, she never thought she would be rebuilding a whole wing.

If someone asked her what Hogwarts looked like and she could not show them a picture, her best description was it was somewhere in between Windsor Castle and the Cinderella Castle she had seen pictures of at that park in the States. It was impressive and imposing, dominating Hogsmeade Valley and fanciful and strikingly beautiful at the same time. One could say it was both very masculine and very feminine at the same time. The walls were of cut stone, rough hewn on the exterior and finished almost to a polish on the interior. The interior gave one the impression of a Gothic manor, chapel or cathedral, depending upon where you were with the light, pointed arches. The soaring windows in the Great Hall truly reminded her of a cathedral.

What she now learned again was that Hogwarts was impossible without magic. Built with stone and mortar, appearing strong and enduring, if the magic imbued in the Castle ever failed, the laws of gravity would take over and it would collapse. But that was all but impossible. It was built on a natural, magical antipode. This was similar a magnetic pole. But while the Earth had but two magnetic poles, it had scores if not hundreds of magical antipodes. Hogsmeade Valley was the largest and most powerful in all the British Isles and it was the inexhaustible abundance of naturally occurring ambient magic that took the place of buttresses, tapering walls which were much thicker at the foundation than at the top, structural steel or reinforced concrete. It also meant that aside from magic, nothing held the stone floors up. There were no true "load bearing" walls. After dealing with the junk, the first thing they had done was to remove all of the interior walls on all the floors. By the time they had finished, the only "walls" left were the stalls for the toilets where one of the "Main Floor's" bathrooms had been. It was surprising how vast and empty the place looked.

They then removed all but one of the fireplaces. The wing did have three real smoke flues on either side that extended from the basement to the chimneys towering above the roof. But these had nothing to do with the placement of the fireplaces. Those essentials of heating were a "permanent" form of transfiguration, not a real

hearth. The elves could cancel it and when they did it was as if they never had existed. The fireplaces were connected to the flues by magic, which allowed them all to draw smoke even more effectively than a real one. The only one that was left was on the main floor where their camp beds, work tables, chairs and dining table was located.

There had been a staircase just next to "The Door" that linked all the floors save the Attic, which one accessed by a ladder apparently. Once the wing was gutted, two new ones were added. The first was at the corner of the West Wall and Hogwarts itself and went from the Basement all the way up to the attic. The second was on the East wall just north of the Southernmost Roundel Section. It accessed every floor except the Basement and Attic. When these were installed, the old stairs were removed and there was soon no evidence they had ever existed. It was only then that the real renovations could begin and it had taken the lot of them twenty-three days to reach that point. Fortunately, the elves were able to complete the renovations of the Basement in the time that remained. The Basement Roundel became the Kitchens. Along the east wall, a four foot wide corridor extended all the way back to the castle wall, where it turned left leading to the stairs. The remaining space was divided into ten rooms. The one next to the Kitchen was for dishes and cleaning. The next one would serve as the Elf Barracks. The next five were for food storage. The last two were for general supplies, such as the bog rolls.

But their second week in Compression, while now eating the first of their cooked meals from their new and growing food supplies, found them still camped out on the Main Floor. The renovations moved to the top of the wing. The Attic, expanded magically several times over, was turned into a huge greenhouse pretty quickly, although no one would be able to tell from the outside. There were growing tables throughout and a watering system. There were also a couple of work tables, upon which were tools and several boxes containing seeds and cuttings, all labeled, of just about every plant in the Hogwarts Greenhouses and even a few that were not. There were also some rose bushes, already planted and being tended as Ginny and some others knew Neville loved working with those non-magical plants but that they took too much time to mature from a seed.

The floor below became the Upper Guest Wing. The Roundel was turned into a sitting room with huge windows overlooking the countryside. The rest of the floor was turned into 22 suites, eleven on either side of a wide corridor. The suites included a bedroom, with a fireplace on the center of the outer wall flanked by two windows. In addition to a large bed, nightstands, dressing table and chest of drawers, there was also a small sitting area for reading or relaxing. Each suite also had a private bath (with window) and a large closet. The suites were also magically expanded to ensure more than enough space. They reminded Hermione of very nice hotel rooms and the girls finished their last week of time compression in real beds, with a private bath and out of the Main Floor.

During the last week and part of the next Compression, some of the girls worked on decorating the Guest Floor. The real work was now on the floor just above the kitchens. This work would take seven weeks compression time. The floor would be their "school." The Roundel became a magical training and dueling gym. Heading towards the castle, there were then to locker rooms with showers, one for boys and one for girls. Then there was another gym, this one for physical training. Next to the gym was a swimming pool. This floor a wall separated this part of the magically expanded floor from the rest. On the other side, the castle wall was the far end of their Research Library. Beyond the rows of books shelves were tables for reading and working. A corridor led away from the library. On the right hand side were three classrooms the same size as an average classroom. On the left were two bathrooms, one for girls and one for boys. Next to that was their potions supply room and then a large potions lab, almost the size of their Potions classroom back in the school. The far end was their Hospital wing. It had large windows and a total of eight beds. The Healer's office, supply room, a delivery room and Nursery were just beyond that. This floor was the most magically expanded of all the floors.

Much of Hermione's spare time over the next months was spent in the Library which she found more relaxing and light and comfortable than Hogwart's own. Before each Time Compression, more books arrived. Many had been copied from the Hogwarts Library and many more from the various private libraries they now had access to. She, Winky and some of the others were going through all the books, categorizing and shelving them. Hermione hoped within these books there would be answers. She hoped there would be knowledge here

that would help Harry survive this tournament and prepare for the future beyond. From Lucinda's family there were several books on Dark Arts, although these were not how to books. These were how to defeat those arts books. There was one on necromancy that intrigued her for that sounded like it might have magical that would explain Voldemort. There was also a manuscript on dueling written by a man named Caldwell about 300 years earlier. She and Padma had found it behind some unrelated books in the Library and, as it had no Hogwarts stamp, nicked it. Susan heard of a Caldwell who had been the greatest duelist of his day who, it was said, achieved a level of proficiency no one had ever approached. That seemed promising too. But, much as she wanted to, Hermione had little time to read. There were quite literally thousands of books to catalog, sort and shelve for later use.

They tackled the main floor next. It became their Common Room, for lack of a better word, although it was really several rooms. Castle side was turned into a huge foyer and sitting room with large windows east and west and two huge fireplaces. There were then two bathrooms followed by two Salons, smaller sitting rooms each decorated in a different fashion. Beyond that was their main dining room, a ball room, a recreation room (which had game tables and some Muggle games as well, namely pocket billiards, a couple of dart boards and a foosball table. Hermione did not want to know how the elves got those and hoped they were transfigured or something.) and what she called a "Recreational Library" which now contained over a thousand books from her own home (copies Winky had obtained) including her own literary favorites. The Roundel was a huge sunroom that looked almost like it was all glass. It had a piano, another item Hermione hoped was not nicked from the Muggles.

The next two floors were laid out identically, but were very different in their final décor. One would be "Potter House" and the other "Longbottom House." The Roundel on each opened onto a private balcony around the Roundel. The Roundel was the "Master's Bedchamber." Off the bedchamber was a huge bath and closet. The door from the bedchamber opened on a corridor that led to the Castle Wall. The master study was on one side, just beyond the stair. Beyond that the floor opened into the Family Common Room, Dining Room and kitchen. And beyond that, another corridor continued heading towards the Castle and the other stair. On either side were



nine suites for the "wives" each with a large bedchamber, private bath, large walk-in closet, sitting room, study and the nursery.

The final floor was finished during Monday's Compression. It was identical to the Guest Floor above in lay out but instead of Guest Suites numbered 601 – 622, these were suites 501 – 522. Aside from being used as transfiguration materials, little of the junk that had been on the floor was reused. They kept some swords, shields, pikes, and battle axes – mainly for decorations on the Main Floor – and four suits of armor, again to give their Clubhouse a Castle feel even though it looked more like a manor on the inside. There were also four busts which they identified as being those of the Founders which also found new homes on the Main Floor.

Today's time compression had been mostly about finishing touches. Everyone wanted the place to be special. Each girl spent days working on their personal suites and each family days on their House. They all worked on the Main Floor and guest floors as well. The wing would be unrecognizable with all the new window they cut, although many might not be visible as they were in expanded rooms. From the inside, though, you could not tell. All the windows could open to allow a breeze. But early in the construction during their down time, Hermione was reading an advanced book on wards. Even before the first hole was cut, she had figured out the Fidelius Charm and cast it on the Wing. It took several tries to get it right, but somehow she did. Ginny was the secret Keeper and once cast, the South Wing of Hogwarts Castle passed from living memory. It now only existed in the pages of books.

The lighting was installed throughout as well. Every room had magical candles in wall sconces, chandeliers or other fixtures. These candles burned with a magical flame that lasted for years of constant use and, while giving off more light than normal candles, gave off virtually no heat and no smoke or soot. And they were all charmed to light on command or when someone entered the room or corridor after dark. No dreary torches in this wing!

Mentally, Hermione worked through her list of things to do as she always did and finally it seemed her list was empty. The storerooms were filled with food and supplies. Aside from a change of clothes, all her things were now up in her Suite. They might make some additional changes, but all the major work was done. She could not think of another book she might need, but she had a catalog of

every book in the library and one she could carry with her in her purse as they did plan to go to Diagon Alley. Harry had agreed to spend the Holiday training and seemed eager. He did not want to be trying to figure out how to survive the last task the day before like the last two times. They had even completed the arrangements for most of their weekend guests, at least those who would not otherwise already be at Hogwarts. They sent out letters the week before that were actually invitations. Everyone, it seemed, was planning on coming. Her parents were excited to have a chance to see her school and Winky would bring them here. Other elves were assigned to provide transport to the other families and a special floo connection would be available for the magicals. The letter was keyed to all the guests and only they could read them or use them to pass through the wards. Over the last several months, other wards had been layered on the existing ones. Hermione was pretty certain they could apparate within the wing if they knew how and she hoped they could get one of the adults to teach them. It turned out, Rosie's Dad worked in Magical Accidents and could deal with splinching. Sirius and Remus would actually be arriving the night before. Hopefully, Hermione would have a plan by then on how to keep Sirius from winding up arrested as one of the guests was the Head of DMLE. As for the Guests who already were at Hogwarts, they would deal with that problem on Thursday or Friday.

It had been hard work, but Hermione was glad they had done it. Even if they suddenly decided not to go forward with their plan, all of them had learned a lot of magic. The last few days were being spent relaxing. The Clubhouse Girls were all now close friends, although each had their own smaller group of best friends. The contraception potions had all worn off by now and no one had a meeting with Madam Pomfrey between now and the end of the Holiday. They had worked out "lesson plans" for Harry and Neville for "tomorrow." Soon, Time Compression would lift and they would return to reality. They would leave in time for dinner and sleep in their "former" dorms. At breakfast "tomorrow," Hermione and Ginny would eat with Harry and Neville and tell them about their great, new training room and bring them here. Beginning at nine, Time Compression would activate "trapping" them in here. There could be no going back after that. One by one, each of the girls' "Time" would arrive and they would have to make the same choice: continue or go back. There was no going back for Hermione or Ginny. Susan and Hannah were also certain to continue. The others? Only four others need to, provided they were the "right" four. "Tomorrow" had become a taboo subject.

Each girl was left to her own thoughts by silent agreement. Hermione was not dwelling on ending the Holiday a wife and maybe a mother. Her thoughts were when was she going to tell Harry the truth about what was going on and how was she going to do it?

WEDNESDAY, March 29th, 1995

Hermione was trying not to look nervous as she and Ginny entered the Great Hall of Hogwarts for breakfast. She hoped she was succeeding, but she could not ever remember feeling this nervous before. Today was the day that one way or another was going to change her life forever. She and Ginny walked along the table and gazed around the Hall. Most of the rest of the Club were already there having breakfast. They would be using the abandoned classroom Harry and Hermione had been using all year as a place to wait while this day moved forward for them. She saw Harry sitting next to Neville eating and she and Ginny sat across from them.

"Morning Harry!" she said trying to sound "normal" and cheerful.

"Morning," Harry said as Neville and Ginny exchanged their greetings to each other. "I hope you found loads of useful stuff. I definitely want to use this break to get ready. You will promise me one day off?" Harry added hopefully.

"Yes Harry," Hermione said. "And it's yes to all of that. Maybe a trip into Hogsmeade?"

Harry nodded.

"Not today, of course."

"Of course," Harry chuckled. "My lovely task master is not about to let me slack first and study later."

Hermione ignored it. She knew it was a joke. "Oh, and Ginny found a wonderful new place where we can train." This wasn't true. Hermione had 'found' it, but she needed it for what was coming.

"Oh? What's wrong with the old one?"

"For what we were doing, nothing. But I came across some books with more powerful spells and dueling techniques and we needed a much bigger space. This one is perfect for us."

"McGonagall didn't say where," Harry nodded. "Only to be sure it's not being used."

"Great! I'll show you after breakfast."

"Oh," Harry said after getting a nudge. "You think Neville could join us? He's willing to be a practice partner."

"I'm not very good at anything that's not Herbology," Neville said softly. "But I want to help. I can just study and watch, can't I?"

Hermione smiled. Ginny probably smiled as well. "I think that's an excellent idea, Neville! I'll figure out how to work you in, no worries. There's plenty of room so if we are not using you, you can practice on your own. I'm sure a lot of your trouble is lack of practice and that you find doing something you don't know in front of loads of others intimidating! It's a pity we didn't have a decent practice room First Year!"

"Thanks, Hermione," Neville said.

"But we are going to be at it all day," Hermione said.

"I do need the help. If all day every day helps, I'm for it."

"Harry?"

"I think it's brilliant as usual," Harry said with a grin.

Hermione had been worried about how to include Neville. Technically, the permission was for her and Harry, although McGonagall didn't actually say it was limited to the two of them. Harry had not asked her to include anyone else earlier so she had been worried he might not want anyone else involved. But apparently Harry had beat her to that. At least this part turned out easy. Then, just as one worry vanished without her having to try anything, another one showed up and sat down next to Harry. Ron didn't even bother to say hello and began piling food on his plate.

"Ron," Ginny said, "I thought you were going home!"

"You're not!" Ron said.

"That's so sweet!" Ginny said sarcastically. "My big brother wants to spend quality time with me!"

"Don't be mental! Just saying you're not. Why?"

"Cause I want to study," Ginny said.

"What? We both know you're near the top of your year!"

"And the ones who are ahead of me are here as well! I'm not near the top of my year because I'm some sort of genius! I'm there because I work hard to be there! I've been doing it ever since First Year 'cause I never want another year like that again!"

"Don't think You-Know-Who's gonna try and possess you again..."

"That's NOT the point! I spent most of last year trying to catch up for all the work I didn't do that year!"

"Something you should consider," Hermione said dryly. "I assume you're going to study."

"Are you mental?" Ron said. "Actually, Dean, Seamus and I are leaving for the Burrow later. Had to get McGonogall's permission for Dean to use the floo otherwise we'd be gone already. You're coming too, right Harry?"

"What?" Harry asked in shock.

"What'd'ya say? Few days shot of this place at the Burrow. We can play Quidditch all day long. Maybe head into Diagon Alley. Five days with no worries!"

"I've made plans, Ron," Harry said.

"So change them!"

"I'm not going to! I made these plans a while ago. When'd you come up with this one?"

Ron shrugged. "What plans?"

"I'm gonna spend the weekend training for the Tournament."

"What? You're going to study?"

"Learn new stuff – I hope – yeah."

"What the bloody hell for? The next task is ages away and you seem to figure the last two out just find without working all the time! And it's not like you have to sit for any exams." The last statement was clearly tinged with jealousy.

"The reason I'm exempt from exams is so I can study and train my arse off! Not so I can play wizards chess and talk Quidditch all the time. You're my friend, Ron. But I worked harder for the first task than for the second and even then, I was more lucky than anything else. It may seem like there's loads of time, but I'm in over my head. I started out behind and I'm further behind! I need to train!

"I found out about the Dragons no thanks to you 'cause Hagrid couldn't keep it quiet even if he wanted to. Even then, I had nothing! All Hermione and I could come up with is the Summoning Charm and I was pants at that! I spent days working on it and it was only the night before that I even got the bloody spell to work and it if hadn't, I'd be dragon dung 'cause I had no backup plan other than to run away and hide!

"I thought I had loads of time to prepare for the Second Task. Turns out, it wasn't nearly enough. When I walked to the lake I knew what I had to do, but had no idea how to do it! I knew you and Hermione were down there – or at least I was pretty certain you were – and I had no idea how to get to you without drowning. I can't swim! And I knew no magic that could help! If it wasn't for Dobby who heard something about what Neville was doing and who used that to get me some Gillyweed just before I got to the lake, Fleur's sister would be dead. I'm not waiting until the last minute this time! To be quite honest, I need to stop slacking and start training hours a day NOW!"

"Dumbledore told us it was safe," Ron began.

"For you," Hermione said, "and Cho and me. Gabrielle's part Veela. Water will kill her like that. Unless they pulled her out right away, she would have died. The idiots running this Tournament either did not know that or did not care!"

"Fine. Still, I'm sure you can just hop on your broom this next time and..."

"And I'm sure it either won't work or will be against the rules," Harry said. Ron stared in disbelief. "The tasks are based on the Four Elements: Fire, Air, Water and Earth."

"How...?" Ron and Hermione began.

"Makes sense," Harry shrugged. "First Task Dragons. They breath fire and fly and – by luck – I chose the right way to deal with a dragon where you didn't want to kill it. Second Task was water. That leaves Earth, but I have no clue what that could mean. I don't intend to keep having no clue! From now on, I train hard and that includes all day on days off from school! Now, you're welcome to help, but that means training and study, not Quidditch or chess!"

"You could do that at the Burrow," Ron began.

"I'm sure you're Mum will let me cast spells for hours a day," Harry replied.

"Oh."

"You're free to stay here and help," Harry continued. "But after breakfast I'm going to train until lunch. After lunch I'm going to train until dinner. After dinner, I'm going to train some more and if I don't it's 'cause I'm too tired and am going to bed. And it will be the same tomorrow and the day after and the day after and maybe, just maybe, I'll take Sunday off."

"You're spending way too much time with Hermione," Ron said shaking his head. "I get it. You need to train. Bloody useless tournament. But I'm going barmy here. Besides, the twins are staying which can only mean their cooking something up. The best way to avoid being a prank test subject is not to be around! Sorry Mate. What about you, Neville?"

"I need to study too," Neville shrugged. "Besides, if I went with you without telling Gran and she found out – and she always does – we'd find out whose Howlers are more terrifying, your Mum's or my Gran's. Personally, I got my money on my Gran, but I really don't want to test it."

"Study..." Ron began.



"Just because you don't take school work seriously doesn't mean everyone is like you, Ronald!" Hermione began.

"Stop it," Harry interjected. "I really am not in the mood for the Ron and Hermione Show this morning."

"What?" Ron asked.

"What's going to happen next is you're going to put Hermione down in some way," Harry said. "Then she's going to try and prove you wrong, which while true is useless. Then you'll put her down again, she'll have a snappy if insulting comeback and you'll really say something that you hopefully don't mean but will be about as dumb and hurtful as Malfoy and she'll either go off on you or get up and leave and I'll spend the rest of the month trying to get the two of you to act like friends again and I don't have time for it!"

"I...", Ron began.

"Sad but true," Neville said with a shrug. "While entertaining at first, after almost four years you two bickering has become annoying."

"But .. but I thought she ..."

"Enjoyed it?" Hermione began.

Harry held up his hand in hopes of stopping the tirade. "Even if you had not been such a worthless, backstabbing git when my name came out of the Cup, that changed everything. You came around, but if you think things will ever be like they were before, they won't. I don't have time for the way things were and, to be honest, I'm losing patience with it. I'm still your friend, Ron, and you know it. But you must know that Hermione's my friend too and she's trying to help me and I can't have her in a snit with you. She's useless to both of us then. Don't make me have to choose between the two of you. You won't like the result."

"You'd choose a girl...?"

"I'd choose the friend who has never abandoned me ever, Ron. You've done it. More than once, to be honest. I know you really don't mean to and it's just you being you and most of the time you're a great Best Mate. But I don't need the other times. All I want is to be

normal, Ron. I don't want anything that I have aside from my friends. I don't want to be rich or famous. I just want to hang out with my friends. I want to be able to kick back and not care for a while. Unfortunately, that's never been my life. I don't know why I'm in this stupid tournament. I didn't want it. I wanted to be like the rest of you, up in the stands wondering what the Champions would do and maybe betting on them. Instead, I get stuck facing dragons and such and I'd rather spend my time with Madam Pomfrey... Hermione? You think we can convince the Judges that the Third Task should be who can stand staying in the Hospital Wing the longest without hexing someone?"

Everyone got a laugh from that.

"Doubt it," Hermione said. "That wouldn't be fair to the others at all."

"No it wouldn't," Ron said. "They really ought to put a name plate over the third bed on the right, Harry. 'Reserved for Harry Potter – Professional Patient'."

Harry chuckled. "I'd love to be able to just have fun and be normal. But someone's trying to kill me. That's the only reason they would have wanted me in this tournament..."

"You think it's You-Know-Who?"

Harry shrugged. "Possible. But it really doesn't matter, does it? I need to take this seriously and that means I need to train my arse off. I've been lucky twice. I can't count on a third time."

Ron nodded. "Sorry Mate. Didn't think about that and I understand. But I need to get out, you know? You don't mind, do you?"

Harry shrugged. "No. Hope you Seamus and Dean have a good time."

Ron nodded and finished his breakfast in silence. From Hermione's perspective a potential disaster averted. Ron was fun, when he wasn't being a total git. But Harry needed to focus now and Ron was mostly a distraction. Besides, what she was really planning was not for Ron's entertainment.

Harry, Hermione, Neville and Ginny were on the First Floor. Hermione was taking them to the new training room, although Harry was certain this must be a mistake. He did not know of any unused classrooms on this floor at all. "You sure we're going the right way?" he asked. "And why is Ginny with us?"

"Yes," Hermione answered, "and you'll find out. Here we are."

Harry looked. There was no door or anything. "We're going to train in a corridor?" he asked in disbelief.

Ginny handed Harry and Neville a piece of parchment. "Read this," she said.

Harry looked at his.

The Clubhouse is the South Wing of Hogwarts Castle.

When he finished, he spoke. "South Wing? How could I have forgotten that? I ducked in there to hide from Filch First Year. Snape was threatening Quirrell in there and I ducked into an abandoned classroom to avoid them. That's where the Mirror of Erised was! But..." Harry looked up and there was now a large door where none had been before. "How?"

"We'll tell you inside, Harry," Hermione said as she opened the door.

Harry followed the others inside and everything was different than he remembered. True, it had been in the dead of a cold night the last times he had been here, assuming this was in fact the South Wing. But where was the corridor where Snape had confronted Quirrell? This was a large room which went from one side of the wing to another with large fireplaces on either side and huge windows looking out at the world. There were chairs and couches and tables. While it did not scream wealth, it was elegant in a way. The walls, however, were bare. There was not a single painting which was so unlike Hogwarts where aside from the dorms and baths, paintings or at least tapestries seemed to be everywhere. What decoration there was, aside from the carpets and curtains, were swords and other ancient weapons.

"This isn't what I remember," Harry said.

"We've made some changes," Hermione replied.

"Some? You and Ginny did all this?"

"Okay, a lot. And we had help." She closed the door and a bell of some kind sounded.

"You expect us to practice in this room?" Harry said.

"Don't be silly," Hermione said. "This is a sitting room. You sit, meet people and talk in here. Your practice rooms are elsewhere in the Wing."

"How much did you change?"

"Oh... the whole Wing," Hermione said. "There's a lot we might never need, but a lot we will use as well. Better too much than not enough, don't you think?"

"How?"

"Magic. And before you ask, McGonagall did say we could use any space to train provided no one else was using it. This wing was not being used."

"I'm pretty sure she didn't mean the whole wing."

"Well, her bad then," Ginny said. "Hermione may have taken a little liberty, but it's within the scope of the permission."

"Now, to your original question," Hermione began. "Why did you forget about this Wing and why did Ginny have to give you a note to remember?"

"Actually, I think my question was not that..."

"But it was at least what you were thinking."

"You can read minds now?"

"No. It was just what anyone would think. Do you have the map?"

Harry nodded. "Should never have let Moody have it. I doubt he'd have given it back if I hadn't pointed out it was not against the rules and it was a family heirloom." Harry pulled the blank parchment out of his robes. He looked at Hermione and she nodded at him. Harry shrugged and pulled his wand. "I solemnly swear I'm up to no good." The blank parchment now filled with writing and markings.

"What's that?" Neville asked. "Who're those names?"

"This," Harry said proudly, "is the Marauder's Map. It's a map that shows all of Hogwarts including its secret passages – well at last as much as the four inventers knew. They never found the Chamber of Secrets so it's not here nor were they ever down the trap door on the third floor so what's down there isn't here either. You know Mooney. He's Professor Lupin."

"Really?"

Harry nodded. "The four were the Weasley twins of their day."

"Somehow, I don't see Professor Lupin as a Weasley twin."

Harry shrugged. "Prongs was my dad. Padfoot was his best friend in the world. His real name is Sirius Black."

"The murderer?" Neville gasped. "The one who betrayed your parents?"

"Sirius did neither of those things," Harry said. "The fourth name was the one who did that. Sirius was framed for it all. Wormtail was Peter Pettigrew who, despite common belief, is unfortunately alive and well. You've met him too."

"I have?"

"He lived in our dorm almost three years. You knew him as Scabbers."

"I thought Crookshanks ate him!"

"Unfortunately, Crooks didn't," Hermione said.

"But that story's for another time," Harry said. "This map also shows you where everyone is in the castle at any time. It's practically useless for finding someone unless you already know where to look, but if you're trying to avoid people..."

"That's how you sneak around?"

"It's one of my sneaking secrets, and a very useful one. Now why do I need the map?" He added turning to Hermione.

"Show us the South Wing," she said almost smugly.

Harry looked at the map. He knew where the wing was and had no idea why Hermione wanted him to point it out because she knew too. Except... "It's not there! I know it's there! I've seen it before!"

Hermione nodded. "It was there and now it's not and yet it is."

"What's that?"

"Give Ginny the map," Hermione said more as a suggestion than a demand.

Harry did so. Ginny pulled out her wand and looked at Hermione with a slightly skeptical expression before waiving her wand over the map and saying "Permission Granted to Those With Permission." She then looked at the map and smiled. "It worked!" she said handing the map back to Harry.

Harry looked and the South Wing was back. He looked at Hermione in confusion.

"The whole Wing is under the Fidelius Charm," Hermione said. "Ginny gave you two the note because..."

"She's the Secret Keeper," Harry said. "But why? Why would Dumbledore...?"

"It wasn't Dumbledore," Ginny said. "Hermione cast the charm."

"What? How?"

"Surely by now you know that if Hermione wants to learn to do something, she will."

"It wasn't easy," Hermione said. "The warding is wickedly hard to learn and even if you do learn it the conditions needed for the charm to even work are not at all common."

"Fidelius Charm?" Neville asked.

"They call it a Charm," Hermione said, "but while you cast it like one, it's really a ward. It hides a place from anyone except those whom the Secret Keeper allows. To cast it, the caster needs a real reason to hide it, not just that they want it hidden. Moreover, a caster can't be the one who needs it hidden. And, the person who needs it hidden has to have more reason than anyone to know where it is. It's hard to explain, really. For example: if Harry wanted to hide the Burrow so he had a place to spend the summer by himself, the Charm could not be cast because his need for the property is not greater than the Weasley family's need. Likewise, tempting as it might be, you can't use the Charm to hide the Slytherin dungeons from them as they have the superior need. Your need to hide it must be greater than anyone else's need to use it and your reason must be to avoid some danger usually of the mortal kind. This Charm only works if the person with the need to hide is hiding from someone who wants to harm him."

"That person is me?" Harry asked. "And it's Voldemort who wants me dead."

Hermione nodded. "And since no one else in the Castle was using this place, it could be warded. The only people who even know this Wing exists are those Ginny has told."

"And I also took an oath that prevents me from telling just anyone," Ginny added. "I told you, of course, and Hermione once the spell was cast and some others we trust who are helping us. You will know of this place and always be able to enter it, but you can't tell anyone where it is even if you want to. I can. But it must be my own free will. I can't be forced to tell anyone. Even then, and as you are well aware, I could in theory tell Malfoy, right?"

Harry nodded.

"Dumbledore should have thought of this," Hermione practically growled. "Pettigrew could tell Voldemort if he wanted to or anyone else for that matter. Ginny took an oath that basically prevents her from telling anyone the secret unless you, Neville and I all agree that she can. But, even then she can refuse to. For example, the three of us could say that she can tell Ron, but she does not have to. A protection on a protection on a protection. A secret within a secret within a secret. Hogwarts is said to be the safest place in magical Britain. This wing is now the safest place in Hogwarts at least for you and us."

"Was this necessary?" Harry asked.

Hermione shrugged. "Actually, we hope we went overboard. Better safe than sorry, you know. That and considering what we've done here, we're certain if Dumbledore finds out, he'll take it away."

"Why would he do that?"

"Any other reasons aside," Ginny said, "it's a bit much for a handful of students. Why don't we show you around and you'll see what we mean."

Over the next three hours, Ginny and Hermione led the boys on a tour of the South Wing. They deliberately omitted certain places. They did not, for example, show the boys the Hospital Wing. That might raise questions they were not yet willing to answer and there was the added concern that Harry might think that they thought he was bound to get hurt. They also only showed the boys the boys' suites and their own, not the other eight "wives' suites" on each of the floors. Those rooms were explained away as being available if needed. The two guest floors were also ignored, again more space if needed. Neville was stunned at the greenhouse, as Ginny had expected. This led to the next big question.

"Okay, I'm impressed," Neville said looking at the massive greenhouse but knowing that it would be month or longer before anything really could come of it. "But why do we need this? We're only going to be here a few days at most, right?"

"A few days isn't nearly long enough," Hermione said. "I'd even say a few months isn't. This Wing was remodeled with far more time in mind."



"Hermione," Harry said, "we can't just drop off the face of the earth until we're sure I'm ready! The Tournament is a magically binding contract! I was tricked into it I suppose, but once I accepted my fate I have to compete! Whether I like it or not, in less than three months the Third Task will be here! I can't just run from that even if I wanted to!"

"You're assuming time moves the same way in here as it does in the rest of the world," Hermione said with a smirk.

"What? You made this place the world's largest Time Turner as well?" He then told Neville what one was.

"Let me ask you this, Harry?" Hermione replied. "How long do you think it took us to remodel this place?"

"Don't know. You used magic. A few hours?"

"I had hoped that would be the case too," Hermione sighed. "Even magic has limits. We began working on this a week ago Sunday and spent the hour before dinner each day working on it, at least as far as you or anyone else outside this wing would have noticed. But it took Ginny and I and fourteen House Elves and sixteen others who were helping us over eleven months of our time to do this."

"What?"

"That explains the extra rooms," Neville said.

"Who were they?" Harry asked.

"You'll meet them later," Hermione said somewhat dismissively, but Harry either didn't catch it or ignored it. "This whole wing is under a time compression ward. Time moves here at a different rate than on the outside of this wing. What time is it?"

"Sorry," Harry said. "My watch broke during the Second Task."

"About one," Neville said.

"It's about one o'clock in here," Hermione nodded. "When the door closed Time Compression activated. It was around nine when it did."

Right now, assuming it was exactly nine o'clock when the door closed, if Ron were to look at his watch, it would be twenty seconds later."

Harry's mouth dropped open.

"One hour in here is five seconds outside, Harry. One hour outside is thirty days in here. If you need months and months to get ready, you now have them and that is another reason we don't think Dumbledore should get this place back anytime soon."

"Whoa!" Neville said. "H-how long?"

"How long what?"

"Will we be under this Time Compression thing?"

"Ah! Well, we have it set up to shut down at ten o'clock real time. That for us will be thirty days from now."

"Can we stop it?" Harry asked.

"D-do you want to?" Hermione replied.

"No. Just asking."

"Unfortunately no. And the door is sealed. We can't move between regular time and accelerated time. If we tried, there's an effect called temporal shear and it would probably rip us to pieces."

"Ouch. So we're kind of stuck here for a month then?"

Hermione nodded. "With plenty of time to train."

"Wicked!"

"Only a month?"

"Actually our plan is more ambitious," Hermione replied. "We'll resume normal time for ten minutes to allow someone to get us if need be. We don't expect that to happen, but you never know and we didn't want to be totally stuck, as it were. At 10:10 normal time, if nothing requires us to leave, the Ward activates again. Of course,

the Twins are planning a birthday bash for themselves tonight even though they won't turn seventeen until Saturday, so we took that into account. Their party begins at eight. So that gives us nine sessions to train."

"Nine months in one day?"

Hermione nodded.

"That's amazing."

"And explains this Greenhouse," Neville said. "It's useless for a few days, but in nine months?"

"We provided it and all the other recreational stuff for just that reason," Ginny said. "We'd all go bonkers if it were just a classroom or something."

"And what will we be doing with this time?" Harry asked.

"Well today – as in real today not our today and yes that will take a little getting used to – we going to get both of you up to speed on what I'll call the basics. You're going to learn occulmency first."

"What's that?" both Harry and Neville said.

"It's a mind magic," Hermione said. "It's designed primarily to defend your mind against and external mind probe or attack..."

"Like Snape," Ginny said. "The soap-aphobic git probes our minds all the time. Fred and George taught themselves this First Year 'cause he was always catching them and they're smart enough to figure out how. Hermione and I learned it starting when your name came out of the Goblet of Fire."

"But another benefit of it is it organizes your mind in a way. It makes it easier to learn and remember things and you're supposed to be less addled by fear or stress. If nothing else, you'll be able to think clearly and quickly when others are shaking in their boots."

"That and Snape will have a much harder time getting you to mess up in Potions," Ginny added.

"Which is something else we'll be going over," Hermione said.

"Why potions?" Harry asked. "I haven't needed that for the task and I doubt I will."

"We don't know that, do we? I doubt you'll have to brew one, but you might need to be able to recognize one or something. I want to be thorough, not hope for luck as you said. Anyway, we'll also be doing Transfiguration, Charms, Defense Against the Dark Arts, studying curses and hexes and dueling and Arithmancy and Ancient Runes."

"Again, why?"

"Today is just the basics. Before this break is over, I hope you'll be able to do some Curse Breaking and you need a grounding in those topics."

"Oh."

"How about we get some lunch?" Ginny suggested.

"Sounds like a plan," Neville said.

"But if we can't leave..." Harry began.

"We have that covered," Hermione replied. "Winky?"

There was a pop and Winky appeared dressed in a blue dress. "Yes Miss Grangy?"

"Okay," Harry said slowly.

"This is Winky, Harry," Hermione said. "You remember her from the World Cup?"

Harry nodded.

"Winky be Miss Grangy's elf now!" Winky said with pride.

"And what happened to spew?" Harry asked.

"It's S.P.E.W.," Hermione said, "and it's alive and well, thank you very much. Just a change in objectives."

"And having a House Elf changes it how? And if you're under Polyjuice, does that wear off in normal time or our time?"

"I learned a lot about House Elves, Harry. It's kind of hard to promote their welfare if you don't have a clue about what they are. And for your information, it would wear off on our time.

"I still believe that what Mr. Crouch did to Winky was wrong and the way the Malfoy's treated Dobby was wrong. All other considerations aside, we should treat them with respect and appreciate them for all they do for us rather than like a farm animal and as being too far beneath us to care. That being said, they need to be bound to a witch or wizard. Without the bond, their magic fades away and they die! That was what was happening to Winky when I met her a few weeks ago, Harry. She was a free elf and she was dying and if I didn't try and help her I'd be just as bad as those other so called wizards!"

"But Dobby is free!"

"Call him," Hermione said. "Call him!"

"Dobby?"

There was a pop and the mismatch sock wearing, lederhosen clad elf in a union jack tee shirt appeared.

"The Great Harry Potter be calling Dobby?" he said hopefully.

"A House Elf can only be called – or will only respond – to the family he is bound to," Hermione said.

Harry's mouth dropped open.

"But I didn't..."

"When you tricked Mr. Malfoy into freeing Dobby, he bound himself to you, Harry. He banished Mr. Malfoy when he tried to curse you, right?"

Harry nodded.

"A House Elf can only respond like that in defense of his family, Harry."

"But then why did he come here? Why is he being paid?"

"Cause that be what the Great Harry Potter wishes," Dobby said.

"But I didn't want you to be a slave again, Dobby."

"Dobby not being slave because the Great Harry Potter not wanting a slave. Nasty wizards be wanting slaves. The Great Harry Potter be wanting friends. Dobby being the Elf of the Great Harry Potter and Dobby being friend too! Although if Dobby being unworthy..."

"No Dobby! No. I just didn't know. Of course you're my friend. You could have told me, though."

"Dobby being afraid the Great Harry Potter not understands and gives Dobby clothes."

"But you are wearing clothes! I gave you socks for Christmas!"

"As a gift! The Great Harry Potter gave as gift, not as punishment. Not to get rids of Dobby. Nasty wizards tosses worthless book at Dobby 'cause Dobby be worthless and it has sock! That be breaking the bond. The Great Harry Potter give Dobby socks because he gives gifts to all his friends."

"It's not just giving clothes that frees and elf," Hermione said. "It's the meaning of the gift. Given in spite, the elf is freed. Given as a friend, then it's just a gift, not a punishment. The truth is and he won't tell me, I think he was trying to get you to free him from the Malfoys when you first met him. Maybe he didn't know it at the time, but what he did – warning you about some plot by his Master – is out of character. Deep down, he was already preparing to bond with you and was hoping for clothes."

"Dobby?" Harry asked.

Dobby hung his head. "It be true. Dobby hoped. Dobby hoped the Great Harry Potter might be saving Dobby. Dobby never believed it would happen, but it did. Dobby be a bad elf!"

"No Dobby," Harry said. "You're a wonderful elf and don't let anyone tell you otherwise. I am proud to have you as a friend, so long as you're not plotting to save my life," Harry added with a chuckle.

"And the clothes? Dobby and Winky were dressed in pillow cases and the like before," Harry noted.

"They are in clothes because that's what you and I expect of them, although in Dobby's case, you never told him how to dress."

Harry chuckled. "No I guess not. And I really don't care as long as he's happy. But the pillow cases?"

"Certain families who call themselves proper expect that," Neville said. "To dress an elf means you respect their dignity and those families respect no one who's not like them. House Longbottom elves dress properly. My elf Darda dresses proper or appropriately all the time. When we work in the gardens, he's dressed for it and when we're in the Manor, he's dressed for that as well. I've known him my whole life. He was my first real friend."

"It was a lot for me to take in at first as well," Hermione said. "But the type of bond you have with Dobby and I have with Winky and I suspect Neville has with Darda is really powerful and wonderful. It's almost like you and Hedwig. She seems to know you need her before you do. Dobby knows you need him even if you don't which is why he's a part of this and has been for a while. He wants to help you too."

"Lunch?" Ginny said.

"Oh! Sorry! Winky?"

"Yes? Miss Grangy be wanting lunch for four? Main dining room or private quarters?"

"Main dining room," Hermione said. "A table by the window I should think."

Winky nodded and she and Dobby popped away.

"So what is for lunch?" Harry asked.

"No telling," Ginny replied, "but so far it's always wonderful."



WEDNESDAY, March 29th, 1995 – FIRST TIME COMPRESSION.

The four of them sat around a small table by a large window overlooking the Black Lake. Hermione had come to love the remodeled wing if for no other reasons than the view was arguably the best in the whole school, although she was sitting with her back to the window as was Ginny. They both agreed the two boys deserved to enjoy the view as they had not spent ten months here already. Lunch was served and Harry spent the time telling Neville the true story of Third Year and Sirius Black, including the Time Turner since that had come up at least in passing as well. Hermione was not listening too closely being lost in thought.

The easy part was done, she thought. Everything up to today had been easy compared to what lay ahead for her and Ginny although to be honest she figured Ginny would have the easier time of it. Neville was already at least unofficially Ginny's boyfriend and although he was not tongue tied around the petite red head, he was clearly smitten by her. Hermione had Harry to contend with. She had already come to grips with the truth: she loved and was in love with Harry. Maybe that was the problem. She wanted to be Harry's forever. On the other hand, she wanted to be Harry's because he wanted her, not because she tricked him. This contradiction had been bothering her for some time now and had she not had an incurable case of Helping Harry, she would have not gotten into this as well. But that side of her kept her from turning away. She needed to be his friend and by his side always and she knew he needed to get out from under the control of adults who thought they knew better but did not know him at all and made up their minds without bothering to consider his needs.

She would much prefer to be in Ginny's shoes in a way. Not with Neville of course, but she was pretty sure Neville would make the first move with only a little encouragement. Harry was another problem altogether. All the others were certain Harry was in love with Hermione. Hermione hoped this was true. But she also knew Harry well enough that he probably could not see his feelings for what they were. His relatives had left him if not emotionally stunted, intimacy stunted. She knew she was the first person who he could remember ever giving him a hug. He used to flinch when she did that and still did if it was anyone else. She was also the first person to kiss him although that was only on the cheek at the end of last year (and in front of her parents, although she only learned that

much to her mortification on the ride home from King's Cross). Insofar as kisses were concerned, she was still the only. Harry had never initiated either a hug or a kiss. This made things difficult particularly because Hermione did not see herself as being sexy. For this plan to work, she had to be intimate with a boy who all but feared intimacy and she had to do it within the next twenty days to ensure it happened at the peak of her fertility. How? He'd probably freak if she just threw herself at him and to be honest that was not her style at all. Harry was still the only boy she had ever hugged and meant it. Victor had hugged her and kissed her on the cheek at the end of the Ball, but that was for being a friend, not potential love interest. Ginny had an idea and Hermione thought it might work. But still ... if she had to, she would tell him what was really going on and hope he understands.

At the end of the meal, Winky appeared with three small vials.

"Miss Grangy, Miss Ginny and Master Harry be needing their potions now," Winky said before popping away.

"Potions?" Harry asked. "What for?"

"Female issues for us," Hermione said indicating Ginny as well.

"Oh," Harry said as he and Neville blushed.

Hermione had seen that countless times. "Female Issues" could shut her father up like no one's business most of the time – all of the time if there was no reason to suspect a cover.

"And mine?"

"A form of restorative draft," Hermione said. "I don't know everything about what your relatives were like, but from what you've said to me and Ron and Ginny I can guess. It's not good when Mrs. Weasley has to send you food so you can get something to eat during the summer and from what I've heard you always seem to lose weight from the time school ends until you get away. My guess is they never fed you proper."

Harry snorted. "Yeah. Then again, if Dudley size is being fed proper, I don't mind."

"This potion with proper eating should recover whatever their diet cost you physically. For all we know, you are where your body would have been in any event. Then again, maybe you're supposed to be taller and broader or something. You might not change at all or you might be six inches taller or something. If your body is stunted, your magic is as well and we need to fix that. If nothing is wrong with you, the potion won't change you a bit."

Harry frowned and Hermione knew it was both because of the Dursleys and because he needed to take potions. "How long?"

"Every day for the next six months," Hermione said. "You never took this before?"

Harry shook his head.

"We thought as much. We Muggle Borns are notoriously abused as children. Well, I wasn't, but it's not uncommon given Muggle revulsion to magic. Sally-Anne's parents have practically disowned her altogether since they learned she was 'a spawn of Satan.' She spends her hols with Lavender or Parvati. You were supposed to have been on that First Year."

"Why wasn't I then?"

"Don't know. It could be because of your parents you're not considered Muggle Born and they never thought that your being Muggle Raised is the same thing. It could also be Madam Pomfrey was told not to."

"So Dean and Katie," Harry began.

"Child Abuse is almost unheard of in the magical world," Ginny said. "Some of the supporters of You-Know-Who used the fact that some Muggles abuse their own children as further justification for their beliefs at least when talking to people who were not on their side."

"It's true," Neville said. "Although that rule applies to magical children. If you're a Squib or they think you are, all bets are off. My Uncle used to do some nasty things to me until I had an outburst of accidental magic. He tossed me into the ocean once. I finally expressed magic when he pushed me out a third story window and I bounced."

"As for Dean and Katie no," Hermione said. "Not all Muggle Borns are abused, not even most. It's just that some are and that's far out of the norm for the magical world and usually causes some damage even if you can't see it."

"Oh," Harry said downing his potion. "That wasn't too bad!"

"I think they make those taste good to lull you into a false sense of security about potions," Hermione chuckled as she finished her own. "I can tell you mine tastes like dragon dung or at least what I would imagine that would taste like. Not really a good dessert."

"So what's the plan?" Neville asked. "We start training now?"

"Actually no," Ginny said. "Ron was almost right. We can all use a few days to relax and get settled in and used to each other's company, after all, Hermione and I are the only other people the two of you will see for a long while."

"I could get used to that real quick," Harry said with a smile at Hermione.

"Ginny is right," Hermione said. "A few days to settle in and get comfortable. Besides, Ginny and I have been hard at it for eleven months or so in this place already and we could use a short break. I figure five days off will do. After that, we train. Five days in a row for eight to ten hours a day followed by a day off. That gives us twenty days of hard training with two days to relax at the end. But we can probably start on occlumency today, if you like. The relaxation exercises are actually ... well ... quite relaxing."

"We were thinking of spending this afternoon on the balcony."

"It is a nice day out," Harry said, "if a bit chilly."

"We have warming charms set up. It's more like a nice summer day out there."

"Hermione and I are going to go up and change. These school robes are not good for lazy, sunny days," Ginny said as the two girls got up. Ginny gave Neville a quick kiss on the cheek.

Harry was then surprised when Hermione did the same thing to him, not that he minded.

A half an hour later, Harry was on his private balcony staring out at the lake and the mountains beyond. He really enjoyed this view. For some reason, the girls had chosen the private balconies for their day in the sun. If Harry had to guess, he figured that was because Ginny wanted some alone time with Neville. Although their relationship was supposedly a secret, about the only one in Gryffindor who had no clue was Ron. Then again, everyone knew Ron would go mental if anyone touched his sister and people liked Neville. If it had been Seamus the Broom Closet King, the secret would have lasted only long enough for someone to find Ron and tell him.

This got Harry thinking about Hermione. She was his best friend, bar none. But he knew there was more to it than that. Ron was his Best Mate, but he knew that could go away and he would get over it. His one real falling out with Hermione thankfully was not. That was last year when she turned his broom over to McGonagall. Yes he was angry about it. But deep down he knew she was right and he was too stubborn not to side with Ron on that even though he knew Ron was wrong as usual. He should have asked her to the Yule Ball, but for some reason he could not. Still, the image of her in that dress was amazing! He had always seen Hermione as a girl, but that was the first time he had really seen it. He could have had the most beautiful woman on the face of the planet as his date (not that Cho or Parvati were not very pretty), but he was so worried about how that would work. Besides, she had a thing for Ron, didn't she? She never said or hinted at it, but it would explain her being all upset about him and the Ball, wouldn't it?

"It's really pretty, isn't it," he heard her angelic voice say softly and very close by. Harry turned and she was standing beside him looking out over the lake, the sun shining in her face highlighting everything. In this light, her hair was amazing and she looked every bit the angel perhaps even prettier than she was that night and Harry immediately tried to stop thinking that way about her. She was his friend! Not some girl he could drool over!

"It is indeed," he said not even sure if he meant the view. No, he was sure he meant her deep down. She turned and smiled at him. It was one of those smiles that went all the way to her hairline and she was just so ...

She turned away slightly and walked towards one of those lounge like things Harry had seen in other people's yards where they would relax on a sunny day like this one. She was wearing a short robe and below that was nothing but her bare legs and Harry tried to stop thinking about her like that. When she got to the lounge, the robe came off and ... there was a small, light blue fabric that only barely covered her bum and a similarly colored string tied behind her back just below her shoulder blades. Harry stared as she turned and faced him as she sat into the lounge. There was little left to his imagination and truth be told, he never imagined she was that ... curvy. "Hermione?" he squeaked.

She looked at him in some confusion. "What?"

"Y-y-you're, you're..."

"It's just a bikini, Harry. Honestly! You'd think you never saw one before!"

"I – I – never thought ..."

"That I'd wear one?"

Harry nodded.

Hermione rolled her eyes and settled in to the lounge still looking at Harry. "Well, that's because it's usually too chilly up here for anyone to even think of it. Besides, I don't think the girls who were magically raised would dare. They are so old fashioned about some things, don't you think? Wouldn't do it at the Burrow either. Mrs. Weasley would have a cow and Ron would probably get a very, very wrong idea like I'm trying to come on to him or something. But I am Muggle Raised and my parents and I do go to the beaches. Now if I were to go swimming, I wouldn't be wearing this. Mum told me while it technically is a swim suit, these have a nasty habit of coming off if you dive into the water or get hit by a wave. But there's no way I'd wear a one piece to tan! Shouldn't even bother. If it shocks you, just be glad this isn't France. I wouldn't even have bothered with the top there."

"I ... I ... I," Harry began.

"I don't mind if you look, Harry, although I'd rather have you look me in the eye when talking to me. Probably didn't know I had something like this beneath my robes, did you?"

"Er ... no."

"If you ask me, I'm convinced our school robes were designed so that if we had anything worth showing off and were inclined to do so, we can't. And I'm not exactly the most impressive in this regard, if you must know."

"You're not exactly unimpressive either."

"So you're not minding the view then?"

"No. Just didn't expect it is all."

"You can sit down, Harry and you don't have to be so far away." Hermione hoped she sounded calm. She knew it was an act. She was more nervous than she could ever remember being. She wasn't going to tell Harry everything, but she had to tell him some. She couldn't lie to him. Unfortunately, she was afraid of what telling him even some would do. Harry pulled up a chair and was facing her. "Until the Ward lifts, Harry, there are only four people in our world. Ginny and Neville and you and I. And you and I are sharing a flat for all practical purposes so we have to get used to being ... er ... I guess closer than we've ever been in a way."

"I don't mind that," Harry said.

"You don't?"

Harry smiled and shook his head. Maybe this would be easier than she thought.

"How can I?" Harry said with a smile. "In addition to the fact that I think you're ... well ... quite ... er ... beautiful, you're also the only person I can really talk to and really want to talk to. I suppose Sirius could be that way too, but I don't know him like I do you."

"You talk to Ron," Hermione countered.

"I talk with Ron," Harry replied. "It's not the same. I don't tell him my problems or concerns about things. Never had. Waste of time, if you ask me. You, on the other hand ... you know that little voice in your head that yells at you when you're about to do something you know you shouldn't do?"

Hermione nodded.

"Maybe it's my imagination, but I seem to hear your voice. It probably is my imagination. Probably because in a way you've done it practically from the day we met and you're the only one I'm likely to listen to when you do. Even last year when you turned my Firebolt over to McGonagall, I knew deep down you were right. I'm sorry I got mad at you."

'You weren't nearly as mad as Ron was."

"No one can be as mad as Ron can," Harry said with a chuckle, "or at least Evil Ron."

"Evil Ron?"

Harry nodded. "The Ron who gets jealous of me about things I either can't control or don't want and the Ron who gets mad at you just because he can. Sometimes I wonder if he has a schedule as to when to let Evil Ron out. Don't get me wrong. When Evil Ron is caged, Ron's actually a pretty good bloke. But his jealousies, insecurities, and seeming belief at times that the world is unfair 'cause it doesn't revolve around him ... I'm tired of it! There are times like this morning when I wonder why I bothered to let him apologize for being so stupid about this Tournament in the first place. I still don't believe him! Deep down I think he still believes I had something to do with getting in. I also believe that he believes everything is back to the way it was before he stabbed me in the back. Guess what? It isn't! It never will be! You know, if it wasn't for him and the fact that I never had a friend of any description before him I would have been your friend a lot sooner! I wanted to be, but he ... I don't know."

Hermione was stunned, although not as surprised as she thought she would be as she also felt Ron had drifted away, assuming he'd ever truly been a part of "them." "But he's your Best Mate," she began reverting to her own role as trying to keep them together.



"By default," Harry said. "Maybe always by default. You never saw me as this Boy-Who-Lived thing. He did and he still does. Not even Ginny does anymore, but he does. My first day here Malfoy told me I shouldn't ... what did he say? ... hang around with the wrong sort? Well, Malfoy certainly is that. But Ron can be too and I'm tired of it. Every year he's managed to piss me off either with his jealousy or his insane need to hurt you! Ron thinks he fancies you, but he sure acts like you're nothing more than a tool for him. Then again, what you see in him..."

"WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?"

"Er ... well I thought that..."

"That I fancy Ron?"

Harry nodded.

"Don't be daft! The only reason I'm even willing to talk with him most of the time, much less sit within fifty feet of him when he eats, is because he's your friend! I swear, he sucks the intelligence out of the room! Parvati thinks he's part dementor," Hermione then added with a laugh: "She said she knew you two would not become an item or anything, which was actually one of the reasons she went to the Ball with you: you were a safe date. But she also said she was actually having a good time, right up until the point when you decided to talk to Ron and he sucked all the fun out of the room."

Harry chuckled. "He certainly managed to do that. So, Victor then?"

"Is just a friend and I mean that," Hermione said. "He asked me to the Ball because I was safe. I was the only girl here who was not trying to ... well ..."

"Get in his pants?"

"Or something like that. Victor's engaged, you know?"

"He is?"

"It's not common knowledge here, but he and his Katya have been best friends as long as they can remember. She's a year younger

than he is. They were both betrothed to others as children, but when she started Fourth Year, they came out publically as a couple and their families gave them their blessing. Apparently you're not allowed to even date there before Fourth Year. But they did in secret. Victor wanted to have Katya as his date for the Ball, but his Headmaster refused to allow it. Apparently he has an issue with the fact that Katya's Mum is a Muggle Born."

"Since we already know Karkarov is a former Death Eater," Harry said, "no surprise there. So you're telling me that aside from Lockhart there's no one you've ever fancied?"

"Please! That was just a crush!"

"Yeah, like Cho Chang for me," Harry said.

"Oh?"

"Come on! The one and only time I said anything to her more substantial than a hello was when I asked her to the Ball! I know nothing about her aside from her House, Year and position on the Quidditch team and would not know her House and Year aside from Quidditch. For all I know, she's a weepy, clingy, airhead who cries all the time and for all the wrong reasons and is only happy when a bloke pays attention to her all the time and whose idea of a date is that gag response inducing Madam Puddifoots! It was a crush!"

"You've been to Madam Puddifoots?"

"Please, Hermione! You've been with me every time I've been to Hogsmeade – even last year when I wasn't allowed! But I've heard about and we have passed by it. I wouldn't be caught dead there."

"Now Harry," Hermione teased, "you know there are a lot of girls who think it's the ideal place for a date."

"Looks like I won't be doing a lot of dating then," Harry frowned. "Then again, I really have no idea of what a date is supposed to be, do I? It's not like the Dursleys would tell me that stuff and Mrs. Weasley probably assumes that sort of thing doesn't happen."

"Well, my Mum says a date is supposed to be a chance for a couple to get to know each other. She also said something about if you

don't like the person as they are now, don't bother because you can't change them. Hence, I won't date Ron because I don't need to get to know him and I don't consider him perfect boyfriend material now. That, and there is the fact that I never fancied him. How can I? He only likes me when I do his homework for him and puts me down because I actually like to study and want to be smart. I honestly think he wants someone like his Mum and I am not nor ever will be like that! I can't cook and really have no desire to learn and spending my life cleaning house? I want to do something with my life! And unlike her, I believe I can be a Mum and have a career, after all my Mum did. Then again, if I really want to follow in Mum's footsteps – and no I don't want to be a Dentist – I probably need to learn to cook."

"You have a House Elf," Harry said.

"Just saying."

"I actually like to cook," Harry said. "I'm pretty good at it, I think. Then again it was the one time the Dursleys left me alone. I guess they didn't want to be too close to me when I had knives and hot pans at my disposal." Harry then chuckled.

"I didn't know that!"

Harry shrugged. "And how would you find out? I doubt Mrs. Weasley would let me, although I would have if asked and the only other chance was the World Cup..."

"Where Mr. Weasley insisted on trying it 'The Muggle Way' and burnt everything in the fire," Hermione finished. "Even I could have managed better I think."

Harry laughed at the memory, but it was suddenly cut off as a cloud seemed to descend on his face.

"Harry?"

"I wish it was really like before," Harry said sadly. "I wish things had not changed between the three of us. I've been forced to think about everything ever since my name came out of that damned goblet. But the more I've thought about it, the more I realized that the life I had

was a lie of sorts. I was clueless and was being led around in a way. That life was a sham and I'm tired of living that way too.

"When I found out I was a wizard - oh, you have no idea what that meant! I could get away from the Dursleys! I had a chance to make friends and maybe find ... I don't know ... that I belonged somehow? Ron was the first person my age who ... well didn't either try to beat me up or avoid me. I guess I saw that as friendship. Don't get me wrong. I still consider him a friend of sorts. But this Best Mate business died back on Halloween and his so called apology hasn't changed that really. I can forgive a lot, Hermione. Given my life before, I know that 'cause I really should be a total arse and I don't think I am."

"You're not."

Harry gave her a small smile. "Thanks. As I said, I can forgive a lot, but not a betrayal. That's what Ron did. He came close a couple of times before but this last time he crossed a line with me. Remember this morning at breakfast?"

Hermione nodded, although she could not say what Harry meant.

"I told Ron not to make me choose between him and you 'cause he wouldn't like the answer?"

Hermione nodded.

"That was a bit of a lie. I made my choice a long time ago. Certainly Second Year and maybe even as early as the Troll, deep down I chose you!"

Hermione gasped, cursing the fact she had not been using her Occlumency as that tended to suppress such emotional clues, but it seemed Harry either did not notice or did not consider her gasp important enough to stop his rant.

"I suppressed that for so long," Harry continued. "To favor Ron over you - which I would not have done - would have crushed you, I think. To favor you over Ron would have destroyed what little he thought he had and while I wasn't thinking that way, I guess deep down I understood that. This year changed everything. Ron's showing his true colors and I don't like them at all! You, on the other hand, are

still the Hermione I knew, even if you've grown up some. I can't believe you seem to have so few friends aside from Ron and me - and Ron can't really be counted. True, you can be a bit ... er ... pushy at times and too full of rules and schedules, but that's who you are and I'd hate to see that truly change. You care! You care more than anyone I've ever met and not just about me. You care about House Elves. You care about so many things. You want this world to be a better place in the end. There are so many who only care about themselves and whatever and Ron is one of those. You've taught me to try and care. Ron's only taught me about Quidditch to be honest. Deep down that bugs me to no end!

"Since Ron's betrayal - and that's what it was - I've been forced to think things over. Have you ever noticed how this works, Hermione? I get in a fight with Ron and what do you do? Do you take sides? Maybe deep down you do, but to me you try and get things back to normal, whatever that is. I seem to be there more often as Ron seems to need to - er - fight with you. Outwardly, I do the same thing. I don't pick sides and try to get the two of you back in. Inwardly, I've always had a side. It was easy really. You understand me and we're both Muggle Raised and ... inwardly, I was always on your side. So what happens the one true time you and I have a fight? Does Ron try and play peacemaker as you and I have done? No! He encourages me to hate you for turning that stick of wood - true it is a brilliant one - over to McGonagall! I thought to myself who does not fit in this picture?

"Then there was this year. You believed me when no one else would! You believed that I did not want to be a part of this!"

"Harry, there are others who saw the truth as well even then."

"Yeah. Neville did."

"There are others as well. They came to me one by one or so and they've been helping me help you."

"Oh?"

"Later. You were talking about Ron?"

"Um ... right. I gave the git the benefit of the doubt, you know. You said Parvati thought we were having a good time at the Ball and we

were until I made the mistake of trying to be Ron's friend. You were having a good time too, weren't you?"

Hermione nodded.

"Why does he have to ruin it for everyone? I thought that, you know. Should've asked you to the Ball myself, but I didn't. As brave as people say I am, asking a girl to a Ball - even you and I did think about it - well, I'd rather have gone and played with that dragon again. You were so beautiful that night and had such a smile. I wouldn't have taken that away for anything, Hermione. So long as we remained friends, all I wanted is for you to be happy and you looked it and Ron ... the Git went out of his way to ruin your night. Even if it was just a night between friends, he had no right to do that to you, or me, or Parvati, or Victor or treat Padma like dragon dung. No right at all!"

"No, it wasn't," Hermione agreed.

"And the more I've thought about it, the more I've come to realize that if anything his reactions to things and especially to you seem to have been getting worse over the years. I mean think about it! He refused to believe you had a date. I didn't. Nor did I press you. I figured there was a reason you didn't tell us and - well considering Victor was probably the Number One date for the unattached witches - your being his date was bound to raise some eyebrows and even telling Ron and I might have caused some problems."

"Actually, I might have told you," Hermione said. "But Ron's reaction to the news that I had a date stopped me and ... I am sorry about that Harry."

"Don't be," Harry said. "I'd've been upset if Victor had tried something, but he didn't, did he?"

Hermione shook his head. "He was the perfect gentlemen although he did give me a kiss on the cheek at the end of the evening. I enjoyed his company. His English needs work and he knows that, but we still had a wonderful time. Apparently Katya is quite the linguist and he's trying hard because she wants him to and he wants to do it for her. I hope to meet Katya someday. She sounds like a very impressive young woman."

Harry nodded not so much as in agreement as because it seemed the thing to do.

"But," Hermione said, "this isn't about the Yule Ball, is it?"

Harry shook his head. "It was a part of a puzzle. I never understood your relationship with Ron and such and that seemed even to me a bit out there. It was a few weeks ago when I learned why and came to the conclusion that Ron's a total idiot."

"Oh?"

"You had a fight with him about homework a few weeks ago where you told him that if he wanted you to drop everything to help him he needed to pay you, right?"

"I told him I had things to do but if he wanted to hire a tutor, I'd be willing to do it on my schedule for a fee," Hermione said. "How did you know?"

"Got an earful from him later," Harry said. "He said you knew nothing about magic and our world as he put it which I found odd considering I probably know even less than you do. He conveniently forgets I'm as close to being a Muggle Born as you can be without being one yourself. He said you owed him a life debt from the troll and you should know your place or some such. Basically, he said he could have you do anything to pay him back including marry him."

"WHAT? I have absolutely no interest in him that way!"

"Which only proves he may be a Pureblood but knows nothing as well," Harry finished.

"What do you mean?"

"At the end of last year, Dumbledore told me Pettigrew owed me a Life Debt. He didn't really tell me what that was and I had to wonder. He also really didn't tell me what that means or could mean so when this year began I actually researched it. Ron said his Mum was certain you owed him a Life Debt from the troll. She obviously had no clue as to what really happened. To gain a Life Debt, you have to save someone from imminent peril."

"And Ron did," Hermione said. "He knocked out that troll!"

"But he wasn't the only one there, was he? You can't owe two people a Life Debt for the same thing. The debt attaches to the one who took the greater risks. Ron was not in immediate danger at any time. He stood by the open door and could have gotten away if he had bothered. I, on the other hand..."

"Jumped on its back," Hermione finished.

"And there's another thing about Life Debts," Harry continued. "Even if Ron did save your life, because he was the reason your life was in danger in the first place, he can't claim a Life Debt. I was the one who came looking for you, Hermione. He was the reason I had to in the first place. His actions earlier that day placed you in a life threatening position. So, you owe me a life debt for that. But even if you owed Ron, that debt was cancelled last year when I saved us from the Dementors. You can't owe more than one Debt at a time and I'm certain that one is your current one - unless someone saved your life more recently and I'm not aware of it."

"The Second Task?"

"Your life wasn't in real danger, was it? We didn't know that but you did."

Hermione nodded. Her life was not in danger and neither was Ron's or Cho's. Gabrielle was another matter altogether, but Harry didn't need to know that just yet.

"And what does owing a Life Debt mean?" Hermione asked.

"Depends upon the strength of the debt," Harry replied. "It also depends upon the people involved. It didn't make you my friend, Hermione. It may have helped, but if you thought I was a total jerk, you still would. We became friends because we did. The Life Debt may have helped, but it's not the reason. It can't make us love each other, Hermione. Thank Merlin for that really."

"What do you mean?" Hermione asked.

"I ... well ... I don't really know what love is. But I think ... I think I know. And I think I love you."



Hermione gasped. "Harry? I ... I don't know what to say."

Harry looked extremely disappointed. "Well, I suppose we can still be friends then."

"No!" Hermione panicked. "It's just ... I'm surprised is all. You're so guarded with your emotions. Not that I'm all that open either. Harry? I've always hoped to hear that from you, I suppose. I know I've loved you since First Year and I know now I am hopelessly in love with you. I couldn't do anything about it before 'cause your friendship means everything to me. So long as I remained your friend, I'd only want you to be happy even if that meant I'd never be your ... erm ... girlfriend. And I know I began having feelings for you before the troll. They just grew stronger after."

Harry visibly gulped. "S-so does this mean ... does this mean you're my girlfriend?"

"No, it doesn't," Hermione replied almost haughtily. "It means I can be and will be if you want me to."

"Er ... what am I missing?"

"You haven't asked me," Hermione giggled. "That and you haven't kissed me properly, or at all, but definitely not properly."

"Properly?"

Hermione nodded. "On the lips and not just a peck. It doesn't have to be a full on snog, but it has to be more than a friendly peck."

WEDNESDAY, March 29th, 1995 – FIRST TIME COMPRESSION,  
DAY 28.

Harry was truly her first kiss. It had been that first day, not minutes after they had confessed their feelings to each other and moments after Harry had told her he had visited her every day for the three weeks she was petrified back during second year. Hermione already knew that because Madam Pomfrey, the school Healer, had told her. She also knew that Ron had visited her just twice. Once immediately after she had been found and the second time was just before Harry and Ron entered the Chamber of Secrets. Still, it was a nice moment hearing about that time from Harry's point of view and he then had the courage to kiss her. Perhaps it helped that she had stood up and walked to the edge of the balcony, and told him she wanted to and that he could touch her wherever he wanted as he was obviously nervous about that given she was only wearing a bikini at the time. It was her first kiss and in her mind it was perfect. It was not a full on snog (those came later), but it seemed to be filled with such emotion. It was also truly toe curling, something she had thought was little more than fantasy reserved for her roommate Lavender's trashy romance novels.

Her first kiss had been wonderful, but getting Harry to go further took time. It was annoying at first. She was ready to offer him everything and anything yet he held back. Ginny had managed to bed Neville that day. Then again, they had already been talking about it beforehand and it was only the fact that Ginny did not want her first time to be a quicky in a broom closet or empty classroom that had kept them from taking that step before. Neville's room in the South Wing was a perfect place to take that final step. Harry's room was also perfect, Hermione remembered.

They had finally made love for the first time in Harry's room eight days into Time Compression. It had taken that long for Harry to accept the idea that she wanted to be with him that way, and some rather overt advances. The bikini had become topless and that led to no clothes whatsoever and he still held back even when she allowed him to spread lotion on any place not "out of bounds" which she said was any part of her covered in clothing - and she was naked. She knew getting past his intimacy issues would be hard. It took four days to move beyond snogging. Day four was when he finally touched her in truly intimate ways and he finally let her relieve his frustrations in ways. She did not mind oral sex, she learned. But oral

sex as fun as it was for her and as good as he was would not get her pregnant. The fact that he was amazing when he finally did get past that was a small blessing given the effort she had to put in. But he was amazing. Hermione lost her virginity on day eight and it had been wonderful, although her first time was nothing compared to the next time, and the next and the next.

She had calculated that she would be at her peak fertility between days fifteen and twenty and she was amazed at how randy she was. Once Harry became her lover, it had been two or three times a day ever since. She wondered whether it was the fertility potion or just the fact that she was now Harry's forever. She wondered if it was because this month in Time Compression might well be the longest she would have Harry all to herself. Ginny was apparently just as randy so Hermione figured the potion had more than something to do with it. It was all Hermione could do just to keep them on schedule.

Ginny and Hermione had started Neville and Harry on Occlumency training the first day. It began with meditation and relaxation exercises that tended to lead to intense snogging sessions (for Hermione) or a good shagging (for Ginny). Day six and it was all Hermione could do to keep the schedule she had made for them. Day six began with two hours of physical training followed by a "cool down" which soon turned into a different kind of physical activity. They also reviewed Transfiguration. Within a day they learned that Ginny's wand actually worked for Neville, or at least it worked much better than his father's wand did. During their "non-horizontal" off time, Neville was working with Ginny in his greenhouse - although Ginny did tell Hermione sometimes their work was more horizontal than not. Still, they had managed to review all of the first two years of Transfiguration and most of Third Year as well and their boys were now quite good with the material. Much better, in Hermione's opinion, than they had been.

For Neville, the realization that his ineptitude at magic was due to using an unmatched wand had done wonders. Ginny's wand was not perfect for him, but it was far better than his father's wand which was just barely more than a stick of wood. He was passing his classes with a wand no student should be using - or at least a match no student should have to endure. Pureblood families kept their old wands and it was not unusual for a child to be using an ancestor wand, but for some reason Neville's Gran had not made sure the

wand was a match. An ancestor wand was more likely to match than not, but that rule was hardly absolute. Discovering it was the wand and not the wizard that was the problem really improved Neville's self confidence. Harry had taught the three of them the Patronus Charm. Hermione and Ginny had managed to produce corporeal ones. Hermione's was an otter and Ginny's a horse. Neville's was close and he and the others all agreed it was just a matter of the right wand. Ginny's was better than his father's, but not perfect and Neville was now looking forward to the planned trip to Diagon Alley so that he could have his own matched wand and find out what that huge blob of light really was.

It was now the evening of Day 28 and both Hermione and Ginny were officially late. Hermione's period had been like clockwork for the last two years or more and Ginny's was not irregular either. That morning they had tested themselves with a charm. It would only tell them whether they were pregnant or not and it came up "Strong Positive" for both of them. Neither had told Harry or Neville much about what was going on. Hermione had wanted to at first, but getting Harry to become intimate had taken priority and then training had distracted her. Ginny admitted that being Neville's love had been a totally wonderful distraction.

But the time for distractions was over. They had two days left under compression before the ward lifted at which time Ginny and Hermione would leave the South Wing for what would seem to them would be a little over eight hours but to Harry and Neville would be eight months. They would leave and two new girls would take their place, each of whom would have made their decision to become the second wives. Admittedly, even that decision would not be final. Once the new girls entered Time Compression, they would still have the right to refuse, but they would be stuck in here until their month was up. What was critical in Hermione's mind was that Harry and Neville needed to be convinced to accept each of the remaining girls' decisions and if that meant accept them as wives, then so be it. Hermione knew it would be hard for them to accept this, especially Harry. They both needed to know this was not infidelity, not really.

After dinner they had gathered on the Main Floor balcony. All four of them liked the balconies and the view and mild weather. True, it barely ever changed at all given that beyond their wards less than an hour had passed. But it was a lovely day outside all the time so of course they took advantage of that. The renovations had continued

during this month and were still ongoing as the elves were extending the balconies on the Private Apartments above almost all the way to the castle wall allowing for access to the balconies from all the apartments rather than just from the Master's Bedchambers. The Main Floor balcony was also being extended to allow more access and room to enjoy the "outside." In addition, two lifts were being installed that would access most of the wing. Only the Greenhouse and Basement would not be accessible by lift. There was a lift at either end of the Wing right beside one of the staircases.

The girls were seated across from their boys. Hermione looked at them and took a breath.

"So then," she said, "this lovely month is almost over. Two days from now for us at ten in the morning we return to real time for a bit. Ginny and I've been meaning to tell you why we've done all this but ... well ... we got a bit distracted."

"I hope it was a very pleasant distraction," Harry said.

Hermione and Ginny both smiled. "It was and is, Harry," Hermione said. "I wish we could be like this forever and Ginny and I hope we will be one day, but there are things going on that require us to think of one day and until then work to make that one day a reality."

"The Tournament," Harry said with a frown.

"All this began with that," Hermione nodded. "This began the day your name came out of the Goblet of Fire. I didn't believe you had somehow managed to enter. I didn't believe you wanted anything to do with the Tournament aside from maybe watching. At first I thought I was alone."

"I didn't believe it either," Neville said. "You've done enough, Harry. Why would you want this? I understand going after Quirrell and going to save Ginny and the Troll. Those things were forced upon you in a way and maybe I would have been there too if my magic wasn't so wonky. And your last year as well makes sense. You found yourself in those situations because no one else tried. But this Tournament was purely voluntary and - to be quite honest - a little beneath you."

"Thanks Nev," Harry said.

"There were others as well, Harry," Hermione said. "Most of them had never thought much about The Boy Who Lived."

"I did once," Ginny admitted. "I'm not proud of that, Harry. But I got over it. Being possessed by Voldemort tends to do that, I suppose."

Hermione nodded. "But the members of our club have watched you. They see the real Harry and one by one they came to me, knowing I was probably your closest friend - especially after Ron turned out the way he did, everyone saw that - and they offered to help in whatever way they could. Our first goals were to find a way to get you out of the Tournament."

"Yeah," Harry said. "All I had to do was refuse, I know. As I did not intend to enter, there was no contract unless I agreed to it! No one told me that! And I didn't find out until it really was too late."

"We know, Harry," Hermione said. "It made no sense to us at first either. Once we realized you were stuck in this thing, we set out to help you get through it. McGonagall's permission was primarily for me to help you, but she never said I couldn't have help! So while I helped you, there were others like Ginny who were helping me. And, we then decided to find out why you were stuck in this Tournament when you didn't have to be."

"Pieces to a puzzle," Ginny said. "A few of us already had them, but had never seen the others. Our pieces made no sense without the others and more pieces."

"What do you mean?" Harry began.

"This goes well beyond the silly Tournament, Harry," Hermione said. "We've put many of the pieces together we think. We don't like the answer at all, but nothing else makes sense. Harry? Have you ever wondered why your life has been the way it is?"

"I know why," Harry replied. "Voldemort is why."

"But why?" Hermione asked. "Why you? Why your family? What made him come after you at all? Why were you so special to him that he attacked you when he did? And it's not just you, Harry. Neville's family suffered as well. Why?"

Harry shrugged. "Guess it's my luck. Were it not for bad luck I might not have any at all."

"It wasn't luck, Harry," Hermione said. "Everything that happened to you, your parents and Neville and his happened for a reason. It happened because two men should have known better and did not. Those two men are the reason for everything!"

"Voldemort I get," Harry said. "You're not saying Sirius or Wormtail..."

"No Harry," Hermione said calmly. "They were as caught up in this mess as you were. No. The other man who ruined your life is Dumbledore."

"Dumbledore?" Harry asked in shock. "But ... but ... but he's the leader of the Light! He's always been nice to me and he's the only wizard Voldemort fears!"

"The One with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches," Ginny began and continued.

"What was that rubbish?" Harry asked.

"It was a prophecy," Hermione said. "Apparently a real one. Professor Trelawney made it to Dumbledore a few months before you and Neville were born. Dumbledore knows it and believes it. We think Voldemort knows part of it but not all. Everything that's happened to you, Harry, and everything that's happened to Neville stems from that prophecy."

"I don't understand," Neville said. "What's all that mean?"

"We don't know for certain," Hermione admitted. "One of our members has studied this stuff and even she can't say for certain. What is certain is it's real enough and duly recorded with the Department of Mysteries. But while prophecies are the one branch of divination with at least some merit, they are still dodgy things. They are not destined to come to pass. The most simple explanation of one is that it says if X happens then Y will happen. But X is by no means certain and if X never happens, Y will never happen. It takes someone to do something to set the ball rolling. The first part of the

prophecy defined who the One might be. Due to the language, we are fairly certain the Dark Lord is Voldemort. We are almost certain that when this prophecy was made the One was not born yet. It's not so certain whether he - and it is a wizard - was to be born soon or not. But some of us have access to Ministry records and there are only two people alive today who fit the bill: one is you, Harry, and the other is Neville."

Both boys' mouths dropped open.

"You were both born within three hours of each other and the end of July 1980," Ginny said. "Both of your parents had fought Voldemort on three occasions and lived to tell the tale. No one else fits."

"Shit!" Harry and Neville said together.

"Crude but accurate," Hermione replied. "Both of your families were placed under the Fidelius Charm almost immediately after that prophecy was uttered and certainly after you were born and your birth announcements were about to be made public. Sirius Black was the Potter Secret Keeper and Fabian Prewett the Longbottom's. We guess that was on orders of Dumbledore. Skip forward to October 1981 ... Fabian Prewett was murdered. We know that from the Court Records of the Trial of Bellatrix LeStrange."

Neville gasped.

"We also know from that record that Dumbledore told the Potters to change Secret Keepers and that the Longbottoms were told to replace Prewett. Maybe it's a coincidence and maybe not, but the new Secret Keepers were both Death Eaters, spies within Dumbledore's organization."

"He set us up!" Harry said.

"That is a possibility," Hermione said. "We don't know that for certain, but it is a possibility. Worst case? He set you both up to find out who The One was."

"And I got marked!" Harry said.

"Again, we're not certain of that, Harry. You got a scar. But does that mark you as his equal? Does it? Does it when we know that on that



night your family was not the only one Voldemort planned to wipe out? He got to you first, but he was going for Neville as well."

"Okay, I am confused now."

"We think Voldemort knew the first part of the prophecy but not all of it. Had he known the whole thing, we think he would never have come after either of you. An attack might be the mark! Once the One was marked, he would have set the prophecy in motion and the rest of it seems to mean it would be his undoing. Had he known the whole prophecy - and assuming he's not a total idiot - his best move would be to ignore the both of you. Any attack on you or your family's could be The Mark and that would set you up to be the One. Ignore you and the prophecy is a nothing. Remember, prophecies require an action to bring about their result. Everything that has happened flows from that prophecy. What happened to your parents', Harry's life with the Dursleys, the fact that neither of you have received any real training beyond what any of us could expect, even indirectly Neville's wand..."

"Our Professors are supposed to look for that," Ginny said. "Your's was obvious, Neville. Yet nothing was done!"

"You should never ever have gone to the Dursleys," Hermione continued. "Sirius was your Godfather. That means something in this world. Even if he was a Death Eater, he could never have betrayed you or your parents based on that bond alone. Sirius aside, you should have been sent to your Grandfather Charlus Potter who was still alive. Even then, there were other magical families who had a better claim as guardians than any Muggles. Dumbledore sent you into that hell. He ignored the law and tradition. Maybe he had a good reason to do so, I don't know. But he should have told you all of this years ago and yet he has not. Why?"

"But...", Harry began.

"He can't be trusted!," Hermione continued. "I'm not saying he never can be, but he has to come clean and tell you everything. Unless he does that, he's as much your enemy as Voldemort and maybe worse. At least you truly know where you stand with the other one. There's only one thing to do..."

"What's that?" Harry asked.

"As of right know, and whether he had the legal authority or not, Dumbledore is your magical guardian. Sirius should be, but being a fugitive is a problem in that regard. So long as your Dumbledore's Ward, what he says goes. We think he means you to die, Harry."

"WHAT? WHY?"

"We think," Ginny continued, "he's misinterpreted the last part of the prophecy. He believes 'Live' and 'Survive' mean the same thing. They don't. But he never studied Divination at all. I'm not taking it either. It's mostly rubbish. But we have a few who are and they can tell us that those two words mean very different things. Live means to live the life you want, Harry. Survive means to still exist."

"H-how do you know this?" Harry asked.

"My parents and Dumbledore - as your Magical Guardian - entered into a contract. I am to be your wife within the next year or so - not later than your sixteenth birthday in fact. I am to continue the Potter line."

"WHAT?"

"It's a binding contract," Hermione said. "Or at least it's binding so long as it is executed before you come of age and can stop it."

"I don't want this, Harry," Ginny said. "I'll admit, you're not a bad match. But I love Neville and not you, not like that. But right now, you and I and Neville are stuck! So long as Dumbledore and my parents control our lives, we're stuck!"

Harry could not respond. Neville could. "Let me guess," he said, "you lot's figured out how to get us all un-stuck?"

The two girls blushed furiously.

"We have," Hermione said.

"We don't regret it, but we're sorry," Ginny added.

"What do you mean?" Harry asked.

"To get us all un-stuck," Ginny said, "the lot of us has to become emancipated. That means our parents and guardians no longer have a say in our lives."

"It means," Hermione added, "that we become legal adults."

"You didn't," Neville began.

"I love you, Neville!" Ginny replied. "Harry's my brother in all but blood - and we happen to be cousins. But I love YOU! This was necessary for you and for my brother Harry. I'd do anything for the two of you!"

"What the bloody hell does that mean?" Harry began.

Neville hung his head and shook it. "There is but one way to become an adult without our parent's or guardian's permission," he said. "We have to marry them. I'm not complaining, but damn!"

"But don't we need permission?" Harry asked.

"Usually," Neville said. "But not if they're pregnant with our child and we agree to marry them."

"WHAT?"

"You're saying the two of you are..." Neville began. "But how? True! We've been intimate Ginny, but you're supposed to be on a potion that prevents this!"

"One which wears off in three months," Ginny said. "We've been under Time Compression far longer than that since our last dose."

"And the potion you were taking?" Neville asked.

"Fertility potion," Ginny said. "Just a general one. Could be a girl or boy and we won't know that for a while yet."

"You're both pregnant?" Harry asked in shock. "On purpose? Why didn't you tell us this earlier?"

Hermione's eyes filled with tears. "I ... I wanted to, Harry. Honestly! But I was afraid you'd reject me and ... Harry this is the only way to

get your life back, to get what you truly want! I want you to have a family - a real one! And I want to be a part of it. I'm so sorry it came out this way," and she started to sob.

Neville stood and walked over to Ginny. He pulled her onto her feet and hugged her. "I would have liked a head's up on this, Gin," he said. "I would have liked to have gotten you the ring and all that, taken you out on a romantic date after getting your parent's blessing and asked you proper to be mine forever. I now suspect the parent part would never have worked out. I wish we were older, but I accept this. You do know what this means, don't you? You do know about my family contract with House Bones?"

Ginny nodded. "I don't care, Neville. I just want this!"

"I love you too, Gin," he said holding her close.

Harry took the hint. The truth was he loved Hermione desperately. So this was far sooner than expected, he did not care. He got up and pulled his crying girlfriend into the tightest comfortable hug he could. "Like Neville, I would have liked the chance to do this right, Hermione," he said. "But if you believe this was the only way to get what we both want, I'll accept it. I still want to get you the ring, though," he added in a whisper as he held her. "You're okay with this?"

"So long as you're my husband, yes Harry," she said. "I love you. You've always wanted a real family and I want to give that to you, My Love!"

"Bit young, don't you think?"

"It was either this or your being forced to marry Ginny," Hermione replied. "Ginny's Mum worships Dumbledore so..."

"So," Ginny said, "I saw that contract! They're allowed to use any magical means to control us! We'd be potioned up! This summer in all probability, Harry! My relationship with Neville isn't totally secret - I think Ron let that cat out of the bag. Got a letter from Mum telling me - telling me! - to end it! I don't do this - we don't do this and we go home this summer to fun with Amorentia! It's a love potions so vile it should be illegal! We'd have no free will, Harry. I love Neville with all my heart and I can now choose him! I love you too, but not

like that and I won't be a part of controlling you! We think Dumbledore expects you to die and that contract was made to ensure House Potter survives! We also think Dumbledore is wrong! I don't want to have your baby, Harry! I would, but I don't! Hermione does! This frees us from HIM! All of us! By the end of this holiday, it'll be too late for them! Our marriages will be legal and our babies will be born and too old to get rid of without committing an unforgivable crime! And don't worry about money! You and Neville are quite wealthy - or at least you will be once our marriages are recorded!"

"This was the only way?" Harry almost yelled.

"Harry, we looked and looked and looked again," Hermione said almost meekly. "We knew the only way to end that contract and to get Dumbledore either out of your lives altogether or get him to talk was to get you out of his control. This was the only way! He hasn't lifted a finger to help Sirius! That would have been the other way provided Sirius saw through him and he hasn't done a bloody thing! Getting married this way is the only way to help you."

"Anything less and you'd fall into Dumbledore's vision of the future," Ginny said. "Where's your training? Where's Neville's? If one of you is the One of that prophecy, you should be training your arse off, not being allowed to slip through class like any old witch or wizard. Why? He's setting you up to fail, Harry."

"And not even bothering with Neville at all," Hermione added. "He seems to believe you must die, Harry. Shows how much he knows! The prophecy is clear to us on that! This is a winner take all scenario! If either of you is the One and you die, Voldemort wins!"

"This was the only way, Harry," Ginny said. "I'm sorry Nev, but it was either this or Dumbledore's path to disaster. We had to do this to get you both out from his control. We had too!"

"I'm only fourteen!" Harry protested. "Sweet Merlin, Hermione! You're not even sixteen and Ginny here's not even fourteen! You think about that? Am I ready to be a dad and a husband? What kind of example have I had?"

"We'll have help," Hermione said softly. "Mum told me no one is ever truly ready. It's all about how much help you have and we have Dobby and Winky at the very least. I'm sure Sirius will be there for

us and probably Remus too and I hope my Mum and Dad. We're not alone in this."

"Can't say what my parents will do," Ginny said to Neville and the others. "Dad should be there and Mum will probably come around in time. But Bill will be there for us as will Fred and George. My brother Charlie will be there as well, although I doubt he'll leave his dragons."

Neville laughed. "Gred and Forge? You have any idea what we're in for?"

"I'm sure they'll be wonderful uncles, so long as you don't mind them encouraging our son or daughter to be - er - extra mischievous."

"Great!" Neville said but he had a smile on his face.

"What are you complaining about?" Harry asked missing the smile. "I got two of the four Marauders! In all likelihood our kids are going to spend their lives trying to out prank the other!" He turned to Hermione. "You're okay with this?"

Hermione nodded. "It is sooner than I had hoped, but yes Harry. So long as it's you and I, I am okay with this."

"So," Harry smiled, "thinking of any names yet?"

"We won't even know what it is for a while!" Hermione protested. "All Ginny and I know for certain is we're late and the charm says we are almost certainly pregnant!"

"You're not certain?"

"I'm not a Healer, Harry! The charm is almost always right but I need a blood test to confirm it! I'm almost positive and about as positive as I've been about anything!"

"Which means you and Ginny are preggers," Harry said. He turned to Neville. "I've seen that look on her face far too often. She's right and we just have to deal with her right-ness." He turned back to Hermione. "If this is what you want, Hermione, I am with you all the way."

Hermione launched herself at Harry and practically tackled him with her hug.

"Um," Harry said, "you sure you should be doing that in your - um - condition?"

"Harry, I'm barely pregnant," Hermione replied, "I'm not broken! There will come a time when I can't do this or shouldn't, but that's ages away!"

Neville then spoke to Ginny. "It's a few years sooner than I wanted, but I want this Gin. I'm marrying an angel who's been my truest friend for almost two years."

"Would've been longer, Love," Ginny said softly before kissing him. "I didn't see the truth about you First Year."

"You are aware I have a Line Continuation Contract out there," Neville said after the kiss broke.

"I am," Ginny said, "and I know what that means. And you're not the only one," she added looking at Harry

"Harry has one as well," Hermione said.

"Mate," Neville said, "we're in so deep!"

"What do you mean?" Harry asked.

"It means my family has a contract with another Ancient and Noble House, one that has a daughter but no sons and no other lines left. I'm to marry her to continue her family line but as I'm the end of my line, I can have more than one wife to keep my line going as well. That means a plural marriage. That means in addition to that wife and Ginny I have to or can be expected to marry a Half-Blood and a Muggle Born as well. That means by getting Ginny pregnant - not that I really mind - I trigger that contract and trigger the need to find two more wives or have them forced on me by political interests..."

"Such as Dumbledore or Death Eaters," Ginny said. "We planned this, Nev. We knew about the contracts and know the possibilities and have that covered!"

"Really?"

Ginny nodded.

"I've always liked Susan," Neville said. "I love you Gin, but I always considered her a friend. Then again, I've tried to be her friend knowing this."

"I know, Neville. It's among many reasons why I do love you. You're so NOT selfish!"

"I have one of these contracts too?" Harry asked.

"Yes Harry," Hermione said. "And there's no question about its authenticity. Your contract with Ginny was made by Dumbledore whose claim as your guardian is suspect were it not for the fact he is practically our government. That other contract was made by your parents with hers before they died and her father was killed. Like Neville, you are all but expected to take her as your second wife to continue her House. And as Neville said, that means you're bound by the Plural Marriage Law which allows you to be - er - forced to marry a Pureblood and a Half-blood witch. But we've got that covered as well."

"Who is she?" Harry growled.

"Hannah Abbott," Hermione said.

Harry thought about that for a long time. "She doesn't see me as The Boy Who Lived," he said. "Second Year when almost everyone thought I was the one petrifying the other students, she stood up to Ernie and her other housemates on that. She didn't know I was listening in. It really - well - she's nice enough and - sorry - she's pretty cute too. I guess I could live with that. I just want it to be you, Hermione."

"I know Harry," she said, "but these are the cards we are dealt. We've stacked the deck in yours and Neville's favor we hope, but we still have to play this hand. I know where I stand with you and it is always by your side. If to do so Hannah needs to be there as well, I'll accept that to be with you forever. I'm your best friend and I want to do whatever is necessary to make you happy and give you your life back, Harry. I know this is weird. I can't say how my parents will



react to it. But I can say to be with you forever is all I want and I'll make any sacrifice to be there with you now and years and years and years from now. You need to be free of Dumbledore and the Dursleys, Harry. You have no life of your own and no choices otherwise. This is the only way we could find to set you free. It means we'll be married probably before this Holiday Break is over and it means you'll also marry Hannah and at least two others. We've set this up so WE control who the others are. Not Dumbledore! Not the Death Eaters and their supporters! We control! The girls are not Boy-Who-Lived fan girls. They like the real Harry and the real Neville. They chose between you two and either way, Ginny and I believe they chose wisely."

"I CAN'T believe you're okay with this," Harry began.

"I can't lie to you Harry. Never could. I'm NOT totally okay with this. But this is the way things are! Had you married Ginny as per Dumbledore's plan, it would have triggered Hannah's contract and you would have been in a Plural Marriage anyway! There was no way for me to be your absolute one and only! I know that now and I accept it only because I know the other girls and they've become MY friends! You were never truly destined to a normal life. That Line Continuation Contract meant this could and probably would happen. Its execution takes Dumbledore totally out of the picture and gives you back some life at least. I'd say all, but you'll be stuck with us," Hermione finished hanging her head.

"Hermione," Harry said, "I'd never consider myself 'stuck' with you. If to have you in my life forever means I MUST have some others, I'd rather have that than lose you. I don't like it. Truly I don't. But I can't live without you and if this is the only way, if this was inevitable anyway, I'll accept it just so that I can be with you forever."

Hermione was soon in Harry's arms. "I wish it could be different, Harry," she whispered. "I love you so much. I'd rather it was just the two of us, but that's not the way it can work. This way, as weird as it is, takes away all Dumbledore's control over you and Neville and me and Ginny for that matter. I know it won't be easy for you or me or the others, but if we try it can work. It has to!"

"I love you too, Hermione," Harry said softly. "If this is the only way, I'll believe you but who else will there be? How can this possibly work?"

Hermione giggled. "Well, you know Hannah is one. Susan Bones is Neville's Contract Bride. Aside from that we're not saying," she sing songed.

Harry frowned.

"It'll be fun finding out," Ginny giggled. "I think it would at least."

"We have two days left, Harry," Hermione said. "Two days left in our honeymoon, for lack of a better word. After that, Ginny and I leave you two. For us, it will only be a few hours before we see you again, but for you and Neville, it may be months. Hannah and Susan will replace us. Maybe not so much in your hearts, but they are going to be here as we were helping you and - hopefully - being with you as we are. It's their decision in the end. But if they want to be with you, we ask that you let them."

"Don't deny them," Ginny added. "We love you and you love us but give them the same chance! You don't have to love them as much. Maybe you can and maybe you will, but you don't have to. But if they want this too, don't deny them either."

"It's necessary," Hermione added. "Try and at least like them?"

"I already like Susan," Neville said.

"And the others who come along as well?" Ginny added.

"If that's what you want, Love," Neville said.

"Harry?" Hermione asked.

Harry nodded, although he was more reluctant than Neville.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29th, 1995 – FIRST TIME COMPRESSION,  
DAY 30.

A/N: The next few chapters are Harry (mainly) and Neville and their other girls. Generally, it will be two girls per chapter. After that, the real fun begins!

It was just after breakfast on their last day of the Time Compression. Hermione and Ginny would be leaving in an hour or so and for Harry and Neville would be gone for months. How many? They seemed to recall it would be about eight. Did that mean eight more girls? Hermione and Ginny were deliberately silent on the matter. Aside from Susan and Hannah, who were not even here yet, the two boys had no idea.

Harry and Neville had each spent part of the last afternoon writing long letters to Hermione and Ginny. They really were not necessary as their two girls would be back within hours in their time. But the two boys felt it was necessary for them. Neville had cut two almost perfect roses from the "Muggle Side" of his greenhouse and gave one to Harry to give to Hermione keeping the other for Ginny. They presented their letters and roses just about a half hour before the girls were scheduled to leave them and got rewarded with memorable kisses each. The girls gave them letters as well. They were thinking on the same page and both boys felt better about that even though they were now expected to "cheat" on their one and only.

"Okay," Hermione said, "now comes the hard part." She and Ginny handed Harry and Neville a piece of parchment. Harry read his.

#### CONTRACT FOR MARRIAGE:

WHEREAS the Undersigned, Harry James Potter (Bridegroom) and Hermione Jane Granger (Bride), being born 31 July 1980 and 19 September 1979 respectively and as of this date, 1 April 1995, still being deemed legally under age seventeen; and

WHEREAS, aforesaid Minors have been engaged in a true affair of the heart; and

WHEREAS, the Bride can attest to having no other prior lovers, being previously virginal; and

WHEREAS, aforesaid Bride is expecting with the child of aforesaid Groom and aforesaid Groom accepts both Bride and expected child of their union as his own and his family; and

WHEREAS, it is uncontested that aforesaid Groom is financially capable and willing to support his Bride and Child and shall not place a financial burden upon either his family, his Bride's family, nor the people of Magical Britain in accepting his Bride and child as his Wife and family;

NOW and THEREFORE, before the below attesting witnesses, the Undersigned do hereby accept and declare they are to be Husband and Wife pursuant to Sections 14, Section 16, Section 29 and Section 32 excluding pre-existing provisions in strict compliance with Sections 26 through 28 of the Marriage Code as amended. This Contract being as witnessed below and deemed legally valid and binding and the above stated facts being magically verified as attested to by the below Gringotts Notary this \_ day of March, 1995.

"What's this?" Harry asked.

"A contract for marriage," Hermione said. "We're underage and usually would need a betrothal contract from our parents or magical guardian. But the law says if you get me pregnant and we agree to marry for the child - even if we'd marry anyway - we don't need permission. We sign this and take it to Gringotts for the Goblins to verify and they record it, then we are married and you and I are legally adults."

"That's it?"

"Not the ideal wedding, I'll admit, but it serves our immediate purpose."

"You deserve the ideal wedding, Hermione."

"We can work on that," she smiled. "First things first, though. I am pregnant and you're the father and we sign this and record it with Gringotts and Dumbledore's out of your life. It doesn't mean you can't listen to him or like him or ever trust him again. What this

means is he can't run your life without your permission or prior approval and has to tell you everything."

Hermione handed Harry a black quill.

"What's this?" he asked.

"It's a magical contract," Hermione said. "This is a Blood Quill which can only be legally used for such contracts. Any other use is illegal. You sign your name and I mine. It draws our own blood which means it cannot be forged. And I'm told it's not pleasant so don't be surprised."

Harry took the quill. "No ink?"

"Not needed," Hermione said.

Harry nodded reluctantly and signed: Harry James Potter.

"Ouch!" he said. "That stings!"

Hermione nodded and took the quill. Hermione Jane Granger, soon appeared on the parchment below Harry's signature. "Not pleasant at all," she said handing the quill to Neville so that Neville and Ginny could sign their own contract. The two couples then used regular quills to sign their names as witnesses to the other couples contracts.

Hermione had told Harry he had already grown a little at the end of their month together meaning the potions he had been taking were working. She had been just a little shorter than he was and now it was closer to a full inch shorter although she had conceded that she too was in need of an entirely new wardrobe given that she had filled out over the course of her months in Time Compression, a fact that Harry was quite aware of and greatly appreciated.

Hermione then stood up and clapped her hands. She then indicated to Harry to look at the wall of the salon they were in. When he did, he saw the wall now had a couple of pictures hanging upon it. Harry remembered that one of the elves had snapped a few shots just the day before so he guessed that was when the picture of him with Hermione and Neville with Ginny were taken.

"There's another one like that in our main sitting room and my private sitting room," Hermione said. "There's also a picture of you in my bedroom and study and one of me in your study."

"Not my bedroom?" Harry asked.

"I thought about it but then thought you might feel uncomfortable with Hannah if there was a picture of me there."

Harry chuckled. "We wouldn't want that," he said. He was still unsure of this idea, but was going along with it. He trusted Hermione with his life and now with a lot more as well and if she believed this was necessary, so be it.

"It's almost time," Hermione said almost sadly. Harry kissed her. A bell sounded telling the four of them that they had returned to normal time. "I do believe you've grown a little," Hermione said. "A half inch, but still."

"I'm going to miss you, Love," Harry said softly.

"I'll miss you too. But remember, I'll actually be seeing you in a few hours." She then handed him an envelope.

"What's this?" he asked.

"It's another letter for you," she replied with a smile. Harry then gave her a similar envelope and a single red rose. "Thank you," she said after an all too brief kiss. "I'll see you soon."

WEDNESDAY, March 29th, 1995 – SECOND TIME COMPRESSION.

The bell sounded again indicating that the South Wing was under Time Compression again and whomever was next on the boys' dance cards had arrived. They were both fairly certain that the next two would be Susan Bones and Hannah Abbott. Sure enough, the two young ladies entered the salon. Susan practically ran up to Neville and kissed him on the cheek. Hannah did not move as quickly.

Ginny and Hermione were about the same height although it was Hermione who had the figure. Ginny had red hair and brown eyes

and a mischievous personality that was fun to be around provided she was not setting her sights on you as a target. In Harry's opinion, Ginny was perhaps scarier than Fred and George, but that was because you never saw her coming. Hermione still had bushy brown hair and deep brown eyes, but her hair had seemed to calm down as of late and was really attractive in Harry's opinion.

Susan and Hannah were very different from the first two. The two had been the first two students sorted into their Houses in Harry and Neville's year and were both in Hufflepuff and best friends. Susan was probably two inches shorter than Hermione with long red hair, blue eyes and a pretty face. She looked like she had a fuller figure than Hermione, although that may have been due at least in part to the fact she was shorter. Hannah was a little taller than Harry at least for now. She had long blonde hair and blue eyes and a much fuller figure than Harry would have imagined. She was definitely bigger than either Susan or Hermione. The pigtails she had worn her first two years were gone and her long hair was now braided into a long pony tail.

"Hi Harry," she said in a soft voice but without making a move to kiss him.

Harry smiled. She was wearing a skirt and a blouse which seemed to highlight her figure in ways the school uniform never did. "Hey," he said. "You look nice. The school robes don't do you any justice."

Hannah blushed. "Thank you. I don't think any boy has ever bothered to really notice."

"I could give you a tour, but you know your way around, don't you?" Harry began.

Hannah nodded. "But I bet you haven't seen my suite yet."

"No," Harry admitted.

"Then I'll show you," Hannah said.

Hannah's suite was on the opposite side of the corridor from Hermione's. It was also a mirror image. Hermione's bedroom was to the left as you entered her suite while Hannah's was to the right. Hermione's sitting room and study were lined with bookcases and

many books, although it was not filled to capacity yet. Her sitting room was more like a library than anything else. Hannah had her books in her study, but her sitting room was truly that. Harry thought it had a homey look to it.

"This is very nice," he said.

Hannah smiled at him. "Each of us got to decorate our suites however we wanted. I like this. Oh! And they put my door in!"

There was now a door leading out to the extended balcony and she immediately walked to it and opened it and stepped outside with Harry following. "I so like this view," she said.

"It's wonderful," Harry agreed standing next to her. "So, a Line Continuation Contract?"

Hannah blushed, nodded and smiled shyly. "I don't think our parents actually expected this when they made the contract," she said. "It was made in April 1980. I was around five months old at the time and..."

"I wasn't even born yet," Harry finished.

"But they knew by then you'd be a boy. Anyway, they did this contract just in case although had things gone differently, we wouldn't be where we are today. My parents wanted more children. They wanted at least two more to increase our House. If those two were also girls, they'd have at least one more and take a potion that would ensure it was a boy if needed although Mum says they wanted to do it naturally and would only take that step if they didn't want more children. But..."

Hannah sighed. "Daddy was killed by Death Eaters in June of that year, before you were born and before I was eight months old. I have no memory of him at all, just pictures. Even if Mum remarried, and she never did, I remain the last Abbott, last of that Ancient and Noble House which means our contract was probably going to come to pass. Mum says they made the contract just in case, what with the war on and Daddy being an Auror. I think they hoped it would never have to be this way Harry." Harry could tell she was nervous from the way she seemed to repeat herself.



"And this means?"

"It means I can legally be your second wife. Our marriage would be to preserve my family line as I am the only Abbott by blood left. I would be Lady Abbott, Head of the Ancient and Noble House of Abbott and wife and Consort of Lord Harry Potter, Head of the Ancient and Noble House of Potter. Our children would be Abbotts, not Potters, but our children nonetheless. Our oldest son would become the next Lord Abbott on his twenty-fifth birthday."

"And Hermione?"

"The Lady Potter now, I guess, and the love of your life. Your children with her will be Potters." Harry saw a tear in her eyes.

"What's wrong?" he asked softly.

"We know you two love each other very much," Hannah said. "I know I like you Harry and could probably love you too. I just hope you can love me a little too."

Harry decided to take a risk. He lifted Hannah's chin and leaned in and kissed her and was pleased that she kissed him back. When the kiss finally broke, he said: "I promise I'll try, Hannah."

"Thank you," she said softly and with a smile. "You know that was my first kiss?"

"How was it?"

She smiled. "Well, having nothing to compare it to ... still it was very nice. I liked it."

The time compression went on. Harry was missing Hermione, but was also getting to know Hannah quite well. She was a very different person inside. She was very smart, like Hermione, but not nearly as organized. She was generally more shy than Hermione was, but once she got used to being around Harry she really opened up to him. She had a sense of humor. Not that Hermione did not, but Hermione kept it more to herself.

It wasn't until Day Ten that they finally became lovers. They both were at fault in a way, although the delay still ended before Hannah

reached her peak fertility. It was not Harry's aversion to any intimacy this time. Hannah was nervous about it and it took her time to get comfortable with the idea and there was a part of Harry that still considered what he was expected to do as being unfaithful. Hermione's second letter to him stressed that she did not consider it to be cheating in any way and it encouraged him allow Hannah to be as she had been. Hannah was very different than Hermione that way as well. Not more or less eager or willing, just different.

Like Hermione and Harry, Hannah was an only child. So far of all those involved only Ginny had any siblings. Like Harry, however, Hannah had lost a parent in the last war, something he also had in common with Susan and Neville. True, Neville's parents were still alive. But they were confined to the Long Term Spell Damage Ward at St. Mungos. Neville believed his Mum recognized him but could not say that she saw him as her son. His dad just stared off into space all the time. Harry honestly did not know which was worse. There was a degree of finality for him, but at least Neville could remember his parents even if he couldn't remember them when they were healthy.

Unlike Harry and Hermione, Hannah had been raised in the magical world. Harry had not really paid much attention to that before, but with Ginny, Neville, Susan and Hannah all magically raised, he was now. There was no primary school in the magical world apparently. Families were expected to teach their children to read and write and had varying degrees of success even within the same family. Ginny's Mum had taught Ginny and her brothers although Ron never really seemed to take an interest in his book work. Neville had a private tutor. Susan and Hannah attended classes with their tutor at each other's homes.

What Harry already found interesting was the fact that despite what Mrs. Weasley told Ginny and anyone else who would listen, only Ginny's Mum stayed at home to raise her children. Susan's Mum had been an Auror before she was killed. Her Aunt had been one too and now was head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Hannah's Mum worked in that office as a researcher. Neville's Gran held the Longbottom Seat on the Wizengamot and ran the Longbottom businesses. Neville's Mum had also been an Auror. Both Neville's Mum and Gran were Purebloods contradicting the notion that proper witches did not work once they had a family. Then again, the Longbottoms, Bones, Abbotts and even the Potters

had House Elves while the Weasleys did not. Harry wondered if that was the real reason.

Training had resumed in full on Day Six. They continued as before. They continued to study Occlumency and were now working more and more by themselves, although not entirely. They continued with their physical training as well and with Transfiguration. Ginny had let Neville keep her wand for now and he was doing markedly better than ever before. The two girls added dancing to the curriculum which Harry found he didn't mind so much. Then again, this wasn't the Yule Ball and he was dancing with Hannah because he wanted to, not because that he had to. The two girls finally achieved their corporeal patronus in the final day of training. Hannah's was a large swan. Susan practically squealed when she saw hers. It was a Badger, the symbol of Hufflepuff House. Neville's still had not totally formed, but again everyone agreed it was probably the wand and not Neville. Whatever it was, it was big.

On Day Twenty-five, there was a celebration between the two couples as both Susan and Hannah announced that they were now pregnant. Hannah was practically bouncing with excitement when she told Harry and was already suggesting possible names. The two couples signed their Marriage Contracts that very night figuring they might as well. Despite both boys' efforts, neither Susan nor Hannah would tell them who or how many were next.

The end of Time Compression was becoming a tradition in the South Wing. Pictures of Neville and Susan and Harry and Hannah now hung on the walls of another salon on the Main Floor. A picture of Harry and Hannah joined the picture of him and Hermione in the large common living area of their Private Apartments and another now hung in Hannah's Sitting Room. A picture of Hannah now hung next to the one of Hermione in Harry's Study and there were now pictures of Harry in Hannah's Study and on the nightstand beside her bed. The couples exchanged long letters to each other just before Time Compression ended and Harry and Neville each gave their new girl a shorter letter they had written to Hermione and Ginny respectively. Each girl had one last long kiss before the boys gave them their roses and the girls turned to leave. For the girls, it would be about seven hours until they were with their new almost husbands again. Arguably, the parting was harder on the boys who now had to wait months it seemed.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29th, 1995 – THIRD TIME COMPRESSION.

"Susan give you any idea who our next guests are?" Harry asked.

"Not really," Neville replied. "She did say I already know her but that's it."

"That was all Hannah would say as well. That could mean almost anyone!"

"So long as it isn't Bulstrode."

"Gaah! Don't even begin! I know we're supposed to have one of each aside from Hannah and Susan, but I'm not that desperate for a Pureblood!"

"Actually, she's a Half Blood," Neville said.

"Not that desperate for a Half Blood neither," Harry said. "Might be Parkinson? She's not bad looking."

"But a right nasty bitch," Neville said. "Already got the Pureblood covered so if she's one, she's yours. And face it Harry, most of the Purebloods in our year are in Slytherin. The only ones who are not are Mandy Brocklehurst and Morag McDougal."

"Don't like them all that much either," Harry said. "Then again, I don't know them at all. Greengrass or Davis?"

Neville shrugged. "They aren't with Malfoy and his lot. Then again the rumor is they don't like boys at all."

"Really?"

"Just a rumor. Bloody school's full of 'em and most are rubbish."

Harry nodded as the bell sounded indicating Time Compression had re-engaged as he thought of it.

A few minutes later two girls entered the Sunroom in the Roundel where Harry and Neville had been waiting. Harry did recognize them both. The shorter one with black hair and blue eyes was Lisa Turpin, a Ravenclaw in their year. She didn't even look at Harry but smiled

at Neville and practically ran to him. That meant the taller one was here for him. She had hazel eyes, Harry knew, and shoulder length, brown hair; too dark to be a blonde but too light to be a brunette. She was a year ahead of Harry and a Gryffindor but, more importantly to Harry, he considered Katie Bell to be a friend. They had been teammates on their House Quidditch Team since his First Year. He was the youngest House Seeker - or player for that matter - in a century. She was the first Muggle Born to make the team at any age in thirty years. They were the true rookies on the team that year and that made them friends as they both had to put up with the older players and earn their respect.

Katie surprised Harry. She was blushing furiously but walked up to him and pulled him into a hug and kissed him - passionately! Harry kissed her back.

"Hey Harry," she said breathlessly sometime later when she finally broke the kiss, "it seems we're to be more than teammates!"

Harry blushed himself and chuckled a bit. "It would seem so. That was some kiss!"

"Thank you," she blushed. "My first! Or at least the first time I kissed the boy instead of the other way around."

"Oh?"

"Cormack McLaggen was my Yule Ball date and living and breathing proof of why some Purebloods suck! It seems he believed that because of who he is and who I am it gave him permission to do whatever. It was a thoroughly lousy date. I'd rather have gone with you, to be honest."

"I wasn't that great a date either," Harry said.

"Parvati would disagree, but that was because she really didn't expect to become your girlfriend and you were a perfect gentleman, at least until the Weasel ruined things for everyone. Ginny, Fred and George are all convinced he had to have been adopted. Then again, Percy was a Weasley too and talk about Mr. No Fun!"

A few months ago Harry may have stood up for Ron, but that day was now long gone. Girls didn't like him because he was rude,

unmannered and ate like a pig. His passions in life seemed to be Quidditch, Wizard's Chess and blowing off his school work. Good Ron was fun to be around. Evil Ron was just a few steps above Malfoy and it seemed Evil Ron was becoming more the norm than the rare exception.

"Then again, as lousy a date as Ron was for Padma, at least she had no cause to knee him in the knackers."

Harry flinched. "What?"

"McLaggen was far too fresh in my opinion," Katie said. "Kissed me without so much as a by your leave then tried to feel me up on the dance floor. That Pureblood git found out we Muggle Borns don't need a wand to fight! Kneaded him right where it hurts the most!"

"I'm sorry," Harry began.

"Not your fault," Katie said. "And don't worry. If you want to do that or more, my only concern is that there are not others watching," she added huskily.

"Excuse me?"

"We get somewhere private and you can feel me up anytime!"

"Erm..."

"I really like you Harry. I know I won't be Hermione to you, but I'm here because I want to be and I know what this means. I'm your friend and want to help you and if that means ... you know ... then I'm all for it! Besides, I think you're smoking hot! I have for almost two years now and no, it's nothing about that Boy-Who-Lived rubbish. I like you 'cause you're a really hot guy and a really decent one. I'm Muggle Born, you know. Didn't know Harry Potter from Harvey Walbanger before you were sorted and then didn't know you at all until we were teammates. That's what did it for me. Don't know why, really, but it did. I'd rather be one of your lesser wives than anyone else's girlfriend. Now, what say we go up stairs and check out my suite? You've grown haven't you?" she added.

"What?"

"You used to be shorter. Now we're the same height so either those potions are working or I'm shrinking."

"Erm ... thanks?"

"So let's get upstairs!"

A couple of hours later, Harry was lying naked in his bed with an equally naked Katie Bell. She had taken him to her suite which was right next to Hermione's. It had surprised him. Hermione's was bookish, like what a Professor would have. Hannah's was homey. Katie's was surprisingly feminine. Maybe his mistake was saying that. She was undressing before him before he could even react. She was taller and more athletically built than Hermione and her breasts were certainly smaller, but when she stood there naked before him, he had to agree with her that she was most definitely a girl. She asked him where his magic room was. Did he take the others wherever or was there one place? He told her he had first been with the others in his own bed and she practically dragged him there, stripped his clothes off, kissed him more often than he could remember and then pulled him to her. Harry was, to be honest, rather shocked.

Katie sighed and then giggled. "They say your first time isn't supposed to be so great, but that was pretty good if not amazing, Harry."

She readjusted herself so she could kiss him and look into his eyes.

"Katie?" he asked. "Why?"

"Why what?"

"This? Why me? Why - erm - so quick?"

"You're a great guy, Harry Potter. I've dreamed of being yours for a while now because you're a great guy. Better than any of the other boys I've met here, although Neville is no slouch in the Great Guy Department either. You're also my friend I'd like to think. I like you a lot and know deep down I can love you with all my heart and all that I am. I know your life is so complicated that I can't truly expect that from you. We all know Hermione's your one true love. But all of us believe your heart is so big you will find a place for us as well. A lot

of girls never really get even that much from their boyfriends or even their husbands."

"That doesn't explain why you jumped me," Harry began.

"Jumped? I merely gave you a clear and unequivocal invitation. You led the way in the end and I thank you for that," she then leaned in and kissed him adjusting herself so she now straddled him. "And I really don't see you complaining," she whispered. "And you clearly are not put off by me," she added grinding into his reaction.

"But your Muggle Born! Surely your parents..."

"That may be an issue, Harry. It will be for Hermione as well. This Plural Marriage is alien outside of the Wizarding World and rare enough within. But we all have our own reasons for this and the fact that you're such a great - and hot - guy helps. For me, I'd like to think I'm your friend and want to help you. And as a Muggle Born, being a wife of the Head of an Ancient and Noble House opens doors for jobs and such. Hermione's brilliant, but she's a Muggle Born like me. Without a prominent sponsor, her brilliance would be wasted in our world and by coming here for school she gave up any chance of being brilliant in the Muggle World. I'm in that boat as well. I'm near the top of my class but that doesn't matter really. Unless I marry the right wizard, I can either play Quidditch or work in a shop regardless of how many N.E.W.T.s I get. I like Quidditch, but I don't want to do that for a career. So becoming your wife helps me should I want a decent career."

"So it's about jobs?" Harry asked.

"More than that, Harry," Katie replied. "We want support. I don't mean money, I mean encouragement and that sort. We want a man who will encourage us to be all we can be and try all that we can. I know you Harry, maybe not as well as Hermione does, but if I said to you I want to be a Healer, what would you say?"

"I'd say go for it."

"Exactly! You think a Pureblood would say that? The rich ones want a pretty face and we all lose that in time. The poor ones who'd marry us want us to kiss their poor arses! Neville is an exception. A rare one, mind you. I don't want to be a pretty thing that's only waiting to



be tossed aside and I don't want to have my options limited unless I lack the ability. Becoming your wife means the only thing that limits me is me, or so I hope."

"I'd never limit you, Katie."

"Then there are the fringe benefits," Katie said in a sultry voice.

"Fringe benefits?" Harry began. But he immediately saw where this was going as he was soon in her with her on top.

"They say the first time is the worst," Katie said. "It was pretty amazing I thought. Time to test that notion!"

Several minutes later Katie was lying against him. "Wow!" she said. "That was really, really amazing!"

"Ancient Runes?" Harry protested. "But I'm not even taking that!"

"You are now," Lisa Turpin said.

"What?"

"You told Hermione," Katie said, "that you felt the Three Tasks were based on the elements. Fire and Air for the Dragons, water for the Second Task and Earth for the Third as a likely possibility. Runes are earth based magic, Harry, the most powerful magic associated with that element."

"Surely they wouldn't..." he began.

"Wouldn't what?" Katie asked. "Surely they wouldn't ask you or any of the other Champions to stand up to a nesting dragon, would they? You did brilliantly, but goodness knows that could have gone pear shaped in a hurry. Why wouldn't they require Runes for the Earth based challenge? Can you think of any reason other than you have no clue about that kind of magic?"

"Didn't have much of clue about the water based challenge either, really," Harry admitted.

"There you go then," Lisa said.

"Assuming nothing else is going on," Katie continued, "they clearly are not making this any easier just 'cause you're not a Seventh Year. Maybe they won't do Runes, but do you really want to take that chance, Harry?"

Harry shook his head.

"Besides, you know all this isn't about the damned Tournament," Katie continued. "One day, you may have to face Him! This is about making sure that if either you or Neville or the both of you ever do, you'll come back to us! The more magic you learn, the more kinds of magic you learn, the more we all learn, the more likely we'll be sitting here years and years from now with children, grandchildren and more. I want to be there with you on that day in the distant future, Harry. I'm certain Hermione and Hannah do as well. As do Neville's Ginny and Susan and now Lisa."

"It's supposed to be bloody hard," Neville complained.

"You don't need a wand until N.E.W.T. levels," Lisa said, "and we know you're doing quite well on theory. Runes are the basis for Curse Breaking and Warding. The Wards we've set upon this wing are bloody amazing and all Rune based magics. Hermione gets this, but she's not the only one and Katie and I are no slouches either."

"Don't worry," Katie said, "we won't be expecting any long essays."

"And don't forget," Lisa continued, "the reward system is still in effect."

The two boys blushed and grinned.

"So predictable," Lisa said rolling her eyes.

"You can't say you don't enjoy it," Katie said.

"Okay, I can't," Lisa replied. "But do they have to be this easy?"

"They're boys, we're girls," Katie said. "I'll sleep with Harry regardless. So yes, they are that easy."

Harry found that only mildly insulting. The truth was he now had Katie, Hannah and Hermione. However this worked, he'd never ever be alone again and he was so grateful for that small blessing.

Ancient Runes was not the only change. Harry and Neville were reviewing Charms as well. Occlumency no longer required the mentoring it had before, but they were both more than willing to spend extra time with their girls on that as well, although now it was in their private quarters and always led to other things. Neville's greenhouse was really coming along and Neville was now certain that their Herbology Professor would all but die to take a look at his work, and Harry and all the girls who had helped thus far.

On day seventeen, Katie told Harry she was pregnant for certain. She had a huge, Harry cooked dinner to celebrate. Lisa announced her own pregnancy a week later and they celebrated with a wonderful dinner and quiet dancing in the Ballroom before signing the next set of contracts all but sealing the deal.

"I want you to know this, Katie," Harry said on their final night together. "The more I think about all this, the more I realize this month together as been our honeymoon."

Katie nodded. "That's what I've thought too."

"Before all of this," Harry continued, "There were - I don't know - holes in me. I felt like a sinking boat filled with holes I could not plug. Sinking. Hermione filled many of them. I wouldn't be here but for her. But it seems to me even she could not fill all of them and I was still not floating. You and Hannah have plugged more holes. Those holes you've fixed are yours and yours alone."

"What are you saying, Harry?" Katie asked unsure where this was going.

"I'm saying I love Hermione. But I now know I also love Hannah and you Katie. I can't see my life without you girls in it forever. I have room in me for all of you!"

Katie had few words. "I love you too, Harry," she said before kissing him senseless.

On the last day of training, both Lisa and Katie managed to perfect their Patronus Charms. Lisa's was a hawk and Katie's was a fox, which Harry said was fitting. When Harry explained what he meant by that, he received extra rewards that night and most of the next day. On the morning of the final day, the new pictures were hung in another of the Salon's on the main floor and in the Private Apartments announcing to "the families" only that Lisa and Katie were now part of their new families.

The Time Compression ended exactly at 1120 the next morning. Lisa and Katie gave the two boys long letters and received long letters in exchange. They also received shorter ones for their other two new sisters and their red rose as their pictures appeared upon the various walls of the South Wing.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29th, 1995 – FOURTH TIME COMPRESSION.

It had hurt when Hermione had left, Harry thought. To his surprise, it had also hurt when Hannah had left and it hurt now watching Katie leave. He knew deep down they would be back, but it still hurt to see them go and he knew he missed them and would miss them until he saw them again. Looking at Neville, Harry knew the boy felt the same way about Ginny and Susan and now Lisa.

"It's hard to see them go," Neville said.

Harry could only nod in agreement.

"I didn't think it would be this hard," Neville continued. "Ginny, Susan and Lisa; they're all my friends and were before all of this, you know. To think they'd want me as more - ME! I'm nothing really..."

"Nev," Harry said, "you're obviously not nothing! I can see you're not, although I'm not about to jump you..."

"Don't swing that way, Harry."

"And neither do I," Harry added. "Face it, though. Three wonderful and totally stunning girls not only fancy you, Nev, they're now all but totally married to you. They're all top of their class or close to it..."

"As are your three lovelies," Neville added.

"How did we get so lucky all of a sudden?"

"Can't say. I at least asked Ginny to the Ball and Susan and Lisa would've been my next choice. I'd say you got luckier than I considering none of your's were your Yule Ball date and Hannah wasn't even your friend before this."

Harry nodded. "We're both terribly lucky in this, aren't we?"

"Yeah," Neville agreed. "Any bets on who's next?"

"Well, I'm still short a Half Blood and a Pureblood, aren't I?" Harry said. "Not that I'm complaining about what I have already. You're still short a Muggle Born."

"Not that I'm complaining," Neville added. "I just hope my Muggle Born isn't Perks!"

"Perks?" Harry asked. "You mean Sally-Anne?"

Neville nodded, "and you should hope your Half Blood isn't Lavender Brown."

"Gods! She such a bint!"

"And with Sally-Anne the two biggest sluts in our year, if not the entire school!" Neville added. "Mind you, Harry, I was never with either of them, but they are a little free with their virtue if you catch my drift."

"I'd heard about Lavender..."

"Sally-Anne has even lower standards," Neville said. "She said to have been ... well with more than one guy at the same time as in at the same time! The Rumor is she's doing Snape as well."

"Okay, there's an image I didn't want," Harry said shaking his head.

The bell sounded.

"And now we find out," Neville said.

Harry could only nod in agreement.

Two identical looking girls walked in. They looked the same in every respect. They wore the exact same saffron robes, wore their hair in the exact same style; there was no difference between them. Harry knew who the dark haired, brown skinned beauties were, for they were both very beautiful. It was the Patil twins. One was obviously his Gryffindor classmate Parvati and the other had to be her Ravenclaw sister Padma, but who was who?

The girls split off, one heading for Neville and the other for Harry. The girl in front of Harry just stood there, seemingly unable to move or say anything. The other girl grabbed Neville by the arm and said: "Let's check out some rooms, Neville!" She then all but dragged the other boy away.

"That was Parvati, wasn't it?" Harry said.

Padma nodded. "H-How did you know?"

"You've been studying me like a good Ravenclaw would," Harry chuckled. "She just dragged him off for goodness knows what. Logical, if you think about it. But I am surprised to find the two of you here?"

"Oh?"

"The two of you had lousy Yule Balls because of me."

"Harry, that was not your fault. Parvati had a nice time with you up to a point. And it's not like you asked me to the Ball if you recall. Parvati asked me to go with Weasley. The fact that he ignored me the whole evening was not your fault. It was his. The fact that you suddenly got in one of your moods was also his fault, not yours. We both knew you could be moody from time to time and we both learned a lot about you this year and it's actually surprising those moods are the exception and not the rule given your life. No one should have had to live your life Harry. The same's true to a lesser extent for Neville we're learning. We've been a part of this almost from the beginning because none of this makes sense and you don't deserve what always seems to happen to you.

"We didn't know much at all about your first year adventures - aside from Quidditch that is - until after. But she and I talked about what we heard and we listened as well. Parvati might come across as a bit of a gossip, but that's only 'cause she hangs out with Lavender who really is one. Parvati listens. We talk. We like to think we're pretty smart, maybe almost as smart as Hermione although we both think that has more to do without class ranks than anything else. Hermione's first in our year and way ahead of the girl in second - which is me, by the way.

"Hermione told Parvati about it a bit at a time, you know. Some was during that year and some later. It didn't make sense on the surface, unless you are willing to believe that it was all a set up of some kind."

"Oh?" Harry asked.

Padma nodded. "From what we've been told, it seemed every time the three of you were stalled, a clue fortuitously came into your possession and more than once it was from Hagrid, no?"

Harry nodded.

"Hagrid's been here for ages, almost sixty years to be exact and Dumbledore's known him the whole time. Do you honestly think Dumbledore would have entrusted him with such a secret if he can't keep one? Even then, Dumbledore is adept at mind magics. There are spells and charms that could have prevented even the most foolish blabbermouth from revealing anything. I won't say Hagrid was told to let things slip now and then, but it was clear he was allowed to.

"Then there were the traps. Seven or eight of them depending upon how you count Snape's. Only the first and last were in anyway difficult for the three of you and only the dog took any real time to figure out. The three of you were First Years and only Hermione was really standing out in classes at the time. Does that make any sense? How could that have stopped a determined and well educated wizard?"

Harry nodded and looked around. He had not been paying attention to anything other than what Padma was saying. He was now standing on the balcony with Padma standing next to him her hand in his.

"Okay," Harry said surprised at how calm he was, "and what does this mean?"

"We don't know, Harry," Padma sighed. "We gathered a lot of facts as you know. But they don't lead to a single, definitive conclusion. We all have our own opinions of where the facts could lead. Dumbledore's over the hill or around the twist. He's reckless, misguided or something or plotting something or manipulating you for some reason. We don't know. We believe he's not saying anything to anyone. We believe the other professors have no idea what he is doing or why, which is why they treat you as they would any other student. The one thing we agree on is unless he tells you everything - soon - you should not trust him."



"But," Harry began to protest. Losing faith in Dumbledore was hard for him, but that's what she and the others had been trying to do.

"The Prophecy, Harry," Padma said. "At the very least, he should have told you that at the end of Second Year, probably much sooner. Legally, you've had a right to know it from the moment you entered our world. We think he's been keeping other things from you as well."

"He said when I was older...."

"Bollocks! Hogwarts is supposedly the safest place in our world. How many times have you almost been killed? How many times was that almost literally at the hands of ... of ... V-Voldemort? No other student has spent as much time in the Hospital Wing as you have, and that's excluding you're Quidditch! You have the right and need to know and yet he hides what he knows from you!" Padma then surprised him. She pulled Harry into a hug, placed her head on his chest and began shaking. Harry knew she was crying. "It's not fair, Harry," she said.

Harry touched her chin to turn it so he could look into her dark eyes. "Please don't cry," he said softly. "You shouldn't, you know. You're trying to help me make it fair."

She smiled briefly and then, to his surprise, kissed him. It broke sometime later and she looked up at him and smiled. "If I ever cry again," she said, "you can kiss me and make it better."

Harry smiled. While he liked the sex he was getting, he really liked this. "Why me?" he asked softly.

"What do you mean," she asked and might have feared rejection but for the soft expression on his face which told her that was not where this was going at all.

"Hermione's been in love with me for ages," Harry continued. "And I with her. Hannah likes me and there's that contract of hers that all but meant we'd be together eventually. Katie's my friend and," he blushed, "apparently has had the hots for me for a year or more. Why me?"

Padma had no expression at first. "Parvati and I were not born here," she said. "We were born in India, in Mumbai which you may know as Bombay. Our father is a businessman and moved us here when we were three years old, well after the war. But he had already made a deal for us with a business associate of his back in India. We're to be married to that man before our Seventh Year here and before we turn seventeen and can refuse. We won't go to him right away, but once we finish school, our fate is sealed. We are to join his harem - and that's what it is. It's not a Plural Marriage and we'd be little more than slaves for him really. He could use us to 'entertain' his friends! He's a vile man, but he paid a lot of money for us. Our only way out is to marry someone else before he marries us and you've been told about how that works. Our father would never agree to another marriage given how much money is involved! We do want to help you, Harry. We really do! But that business deal hangs over us as well. You and Neville are our way out. We trust you two and believe this is not what that man would do to us."

"I'd never let that happen to you, or Parvati or anyone else I consider a friend."

"Thank you, Harry," Padma sighed and hugged him.

"But why me?" Harry asked. "Why not Neville? You say the Yule Ball has nothing to do with it, but why?"

"To be totally honest, we couldn't decide. I certainly couldn't. Parvati does like you Harry as do I. This is no reflection upon that night. We couldn't decide! All we knew is we would not want the same husband. That's another thing we were trying to avoid, but we couldn't decide! One would go to you the other to Neville, but we couldn't decide!

"I guess we knew we would not regret it either way. We drew lots in the end. We wrote your names on two pieces of parchment and put them in a bag. We flipped a coin to see who would draw their name and accepted the outcome. She won the toss and drew Neville's name. I don't regret it and I'm sure she does not either. Personally, I think it worked out the way it should. Neville is shy and my sister is not. I am retiring in a way and your most definitely are not. She should compliment him and I you, Harry. I have no regrets."

"That's supposed to make me feel good?" Harry all but shrieked.

"It wasn't perfect, was it," Padma said starting to cry. "But it was fair, wasn't it? We didn't choose in a way, fate did. And I do not regret my choice at all!"

"I guess I'm okay with that," Harry said holding the girl. "So long as you're okay with this, I am too."

Padma looked up and kissed him. It took her a while to stop, not that Harry was complaining. Oddly, he was getting used to this.

"I wish I had been your Yule Ball date," she said softly. "That was very, very, very nice."

"I'll try to make it up to you and Parvati one day," Harry said. "But I think we can agree, Ron would have ruined it anyway."

Padma nodded. "In a way, it all worked out in the end. I'm pretty sure Parvati's going to be happy with Neville and I also believe I'll be happy with you, Harry."

"I'm not all that much," Harry began.

"Don't sell yourself short," Padma replied. "Both you and Neville are pretty amazing in ways - and I'm not talking about the damned prophecy or Boy-Who-Lived rubbish. I think we all agree the real Harry Potter is far more impressive, even if you weren't slaying rogue dragons when you were four."

"What?"

Padma chuckled. "You should really check out our recreational library on this floor sometime. Hermione started it and it has loads of books - many of them Muggle literature. In the 'humor' section, we have maybe the entire collection of 'Boy-Who-Lived' children's books and novels. Ginny had a lot of them and the ones she did not have, some of the other girls had. Knowing the real Harry Potter, they're all a bunch of rubbish which is why they're so funny. Now, I believe the custom has become for me to show you my suite?" She led him by the hand to his Private Apartments.

Harry would describe Padma's apartment as both elegant and exotic. She told him the furniture and carpets were all transfigured, but now

looked like the kinds of things one might find in an elegant home back in India. Harry told her he really liked it, earning a kiss as a reward.

It had taken Harry eight days to become Hermione's lover. That had been almost entirely his issue as it took time for him to accept that someone, even someone as wonderful as Hermione, could want him that way and mean it. The years with the Dursleys had made it difficult for him to believe he both could be loved and deserved to be loved. Hannah had taken ten days, although that was more her than Harry. Harry didn't mind in the end. Deep down he knew she should be the only one to allow that line to be crossed and to decide when was right for her. If Hermione and Hannah had been "slow," Katie was definitely "fast" given that she gave herself to Harry completely the afternoon of their first day together. Padma was a "medium" and a very sexy medium at that. They did not do much more than kiss and snuggle the first day, unless one considered that soon after she had shown him her room she had changed into a very revealing bikini which was all she wore from then on until the start of training, at least when they were alone in their Private Apartments. Beginning on Day Four, she stopped even wearing that much and fully consummated their new relationship.

Training resumed on Day Six, as it had each of the prior "months." They continued working on Ancient Runes and Charms as their primary focus and their physical training as well. Neither Padma nor Parvati said it to them, but the two boys were really starting to tone up. At the end of the fourth week of training, the two boys were given written examinations in Runes. They were not told it was coming and both were at first surprised, but they took the tests anyway and found them to be pretty straight forward. Only afterwards did the girls tell them they were the International Confederation of Wizards (I.C.W.) standard exams for Third and Fourth Year students. The exams were substantially similar to the ones the boys would have taken had they been in that class. Apparently, that was not the case in every course at Hogwarts. The girls told them that the exams would be turned over to Professor Babbling for grading with the idea they could continued in Runes. Since both Harry and Neville had actually come to enjoy the material - particularly as it helped them both understand the wards that protected their new home - they were excited about that possibility.

The payback was, as had been the case before, teaching the girls the Patronus Charm. To Harry's surprise, only Hermione had been faster at producing a corporeal patronus. Parvati's freaked her out. Harry remembered from last year in Professor Lupin's class when they were studying boggarts - shape shifters that turned into a person's worst fear of sorts - that Parvati's was a large cobra. She feared snakes, apparently, and cobra's more than any other. Then again, cobra's were deadly so the fear was hardly irrational in a way. Her patronus was a King Cobra, the largest and deadliest of the lot, although it only ate other snakes.

It kind of made sense when Padma produced hers. She sighed in relief as she really didn't want a Mummy patronus. It took them a while to figure out what hers was. It was a mongoose. Like the King Cobra, the large rodent like creature was a native of India and like Parvati's patronus, it hunted snakes. It was kind of odd in a way. They both had two very efficient snake hunters. But the King Cobra was supposed to be shy and retiring by nature - unless it was hunting or defending its territory from other King Cobras - the Mongoose was the brave one. Parvati was clearly the outgoing one, while Padma was more introverted or at least the more reflective of the two sisters.

On Day 23, the two girls joined their lovers for lunch each smiling broadly.

"We've done the charm," Padma began.

"And we're both pregnant!" Parvati finished. "Isn't that wonderful?"

After the boys congratulated them, Padma continued. "Now don't be surprised if we both have twin daughters to start." She explained that their Great-Grandmother's first borns were identical twin girls. Their Grandmother and her sister first borns were also identical twin girls, all of whom were witches, the first magicals in that line. The other later children were not magical. Their Mother and Aunt and their mother's cousins also had twin daughters to start, all witches. But all the children of their mother's generation were magical as well regardless of who they had married. "It's rare," Padma said. "It seems that the twins were the beginning of a manifestation of magic in our family, although we can't say for sure."

"So don't be surprised if it continues," Parvati added.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29th, 1995 – FIFTH TIME COMPRESSION.

They passed the "final test." Even though Padma and Parvati had worked hard to make themselves look absolutely identical on their final day, neither Harry nor Neville were fooled at all which made the two girls surprisingly happy. The new pictures were on the walls. The new contracts were signed. The letters were exchanged and the two Patil sisters reluctantly left with their roses.

"Odd that," Neville said slightly choked up. "It seems to get harder to see them leave each time."

Harry nodded. That was exactly how it seemed. "I guess it's cause we know and understand we won't see them for a while."

"Yeah," Neville agreed. "Pad tell you who's next?"

"Nope. Parvati?"

"Told me it's best left as a surprise," Neville replied.

Harry nodded. Padma had said the same thing more or less. "Well, we both have two Gryffindors and a Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw," Harry said. "I'm short a Pureblood and you a Muggle Born to complete the Plural Marriage requirement, which means if the next two do that, I doubt they're Slytherins."

Neville nodded. "Something tells me even if these two fulfill the Plural Marriage requirement, we're not done."

"You and I have four wives already," Harry said. "Those contracts mean we're both married already, or will be once they're at the Ministry. I have no idea how it will work, regardless of how much I enjoy being with each of them."

"Parvati could be tiring," Neville said. "I mean that in a good way I guess. You know she all but jumped me the first day?"

"Katie did jump me the first day and I think I know what you mean if Parvati and Katie were alike that way. Eager and willing to wear you out?"

"What a way to go," Neville added with a smile. "Then again, they all were that way once we - erm - did it."

Harry nodded. "Same here. Pad said it might be the potion they're taking, although she made sure I knew she wasn't complaining at all. So any guesses?"

"Not by name. Assuming this completes the set - and even then something tells me these girls aren't done with us - we can rule out Slytherin. I'm thinking either a Hufflepuff and a Ravenclaw or two girls from either house. You have three Fourth Years and so do I. I have a third year and you don't and you have a Fifth Year and I don't. My bet is that evens out this time."

The bell sounded indicating the next Time Compression had begun.

"No bet," Harry said.

The two new girls entered. Harry had seen them around before, but had no idea who they were aside from the fact they were Ravenclaws, that was obvious from their school robes. The taller one had straight, almost black hair and dark eyes and wore a Prefect's badge on her robes. The shorter one had long, wavy blonde hair that spilled over her shoulders and down her back and easily reached her waist. Her eyes were a pale blue, almost grey color and she seemed to look at him with either surprise or wonder. They were both very pretty, Harry thought. Then again, so were all the others.

"Hello, Neville," the taller one said. "I don't know if you know me, but..."

"You're a p-prefect?" Neville squeaked.

"And not here to dock points or give you detentions," she smiled. "I'm Laura Caldwell, Fifth Year, Muggle Born and I've chosen you, if you'll have me."

Neville just stared.

"Come on then," she said. "We can leave the other two and find somewhere else to get acquainted, don't you think? That and I really want to change out of this ... stuff."

Neville nodded and offered the girl his arm.

"You are the gentleman, aren't you," she giggled. "Let's go then!"

Harry watched briefly as Neville left the room then turned to the girl standing before him, whose name he did not even know. She held out her hand.

"Harry Potter," she smiled. "I hope we can be friends. Until this year, I only really had one other friend. I'm Luna Lovegood, Ravenclaw - although you can probably see that by these robes - and a Third Year. I'll take this robe off, if you don't mind. Houses don't matter here, do they?"

Harry shook her hand and nodded. Something about her was different. She had intelligent eyes, he thought, but she was different. Her robe came off and all she was wearing was a skirt and bra and the latter looked like it was too small for her despite the fact that she perhaps the most petite of his girls yet.

"Um..." he began.

"What?" she asked very innocently. "Surely you've seen more than this before?"

"Er ... I don't think that's the point. Why ...?"

"I'd like to say I'm trying to seduce you, Harry Potter, but while that probably will happen, it won't be today. My roommates thought it'd be funny to hide all my blouses. Little do they know I have others," she added in a whisper, "they're up in my room here. But I didn't change here so... It's not so bad. I know you're going to see far more of me soon and I guess this helps me get used to the idea. What's really annoying is not the blouses so much as this bra! I've filled out a bit," she whispered again, "perhaps more than a bit since we started Time Compressing and I'm now about eleven months older than I was and this thing doesn't seem to fit at all anymore. Since you're going to see them anyway, you mind if I take this off?" She didn't even wait for a reply. "I'm not ready to jump you, Harry Potter," she said, "but we should get to know one another don't you think? And this thing was making me uncomfortable."



"Um.."

"They're just boobies," she said, "and my eyes are here," she added, "and I know you've seen others like these before so you really shouldn't be too surprised. I'm indifferent about them myself. Bras are a hassles, you ask me. But they are important. They are supposed to help the boobies and not just because boys like you think they are nice to look at. You know these are what we use to feed our babies, right?"

"Erm..." Harry began. For some reason, whatever mood he was getting towards, that last comment was a mood killer. He looked Luna in her real eyes.

"You're taller, I think," she said. "Yes definitely. I think I'd have to stand on my tippy toes to kiss you. But that can wait too."

"Um..."

"Does seeing me this way make you uncomfortable, Harry?" she said.

"It's ... no ... it's just a bit unexpected."

"Katie was even more revealed almost as quickly and she said you didn't seem to mind. Am I that unattractive?"

"N-no, um ..."

"It's Luna. I'm named after the moon, you know. So this is more that you knew her before this and not me?"

Harry nodded.

"I guess that is to be expected, I suppose. But you do know why I'm here? It's not like you'd never see me this way."

"Just ... just surprised is all and yes, Luna, you are very attractive."

Luna smiled. "I guess it was a bit forward. Maybe I wouldn't have done it if I hadn't filled out some and if my roommates hadn't hidden all my blouses."

"Why would they hide your blouses?"

"Oh, it's just in good fun, I'd like to think," Luna said, "although it is tiring that way. My new friends are trying to stop it, but..." she shrugged. "Shall go up to the Private Quarters? I don't mind you seeing me this way, Harry. After all, I am here to let you see all of me eventually. But I'd think it'll make Neville and Laura uncomfortable, don't you agree?"

Harry nodded. He didn't want to say it made him just a little uncomfortable too. She had moved her long hair about so now she was not quite so exposed, but Harry found that even sexier in a way. Luna suggested that the two of them should head up to the Private Apartments and Harry agreed. In a couple of minutes, the two were standing hand in hand in the large main sitting room of House Potter.

"Shouldn't you kiss me?" Luna asked. Harry did as she suggested and heard her moan in appreciation as he deepened their kiss.

"That was very nice," Luna said with a big smile when it finally broke. "I'm all tingly!" she giggled. "I've never kissed a boy before and certainly never romantically like that." Luna then hugged him and lay her head on his chest. Harry wrapped his arms around her gently. "That feels nice," she said softly. "It feels like I have a friend."

"Erm ... what do you mean?"

"I don't know much about boys, really," Luna continued. "Until today, no one really told me much about them. I know you're different from me in many ways, but that's intellectual knowledge, not experience. When I was a lot younger, I had a friend. You know her. Ginny Weasley lives not far from my home. She probably knows a lot more about boys than most, seeing as she has six older brothers. But I seldom went to her house to play. She preferred coming over to mine to get away from them and we never talked about them. Daddy's never said a thing about boys to me and I wasn't old enough for the talk when my Mum died."

"You lost your Mum?" Harry asked.

He felt her nod into his chest. "It was just after my ninth birthday. I was less than two months younger than you, you know."

"Was...?"

"September 21st, which means I'm a year and two days younger than Hermione. Although we're both eleven months older than we were a couple weeks ago because of the Time Compression. Well, I guess she's a full year older now and I will be too once our month together is over. So I guess when you're done with your time, I'll still be about your age. What was I talking about?"

"Your Mum."

Luna nodded again. "She was a brilliant witch, you know. She was a Spell Crafter which means she tried to invent new spells. I liked to watch her work. Not long after I turned nine, she was working and I was nearby when one of her spells went horribly wrong and she died."

"I'm sorry."

"It's okay. I was sad for a long time and it still makes me sad on occasion. I didn't see Ginny after that, not until we came here and even then, she wasn't terribly friendly her first year, although now I suppose we know why. Last year she was my only friend here, but she's in a different House so we didn't see much of each other."

"Something's not right," Luna said breaking the hug and stepping back. Harry gave her a confused look. "Oh, I know!" she said brightly and her hands reached around behind her and she undid her skirt allowing it to fall to the floor. She stepped back then and took off her shoes and socks one at a time. "A skirt without a blouse doesn't really work, I should think and knickers and shoes don't either. Come to think of it," she added and pulled down her knickers as well and was now standing before Harry naked. "I don't think just knickers work either, do you Harry?"

"Um, I suppose not," Harry said. He wondered if she really was as pretty as he thought she was or if it was just the fact that she was naked. He was actually pretty certain she was pretty. "You could have put a blouse on," he began.

"But you seem to like me with it off," Luna replied.

"I do. Most definitely. But..."

"No one's allowed in here without our permission, Harry and you like looking at me and we're going to be together, so why not? Besides, I want to learn all about you and that includes what you like doing to girls, what you like for girls to do to you and what you like doing with girls. As I understand it, we can't have many if any boundaries and clothes just get in the way, or am I mistaken?"

Harry walked up to her and kissed her again. "You're not mistaken, Luna."

Luna was not nearly as fast as Katie had been. Katie had been eager, while Luna was curious. She became very eager once she realized how much she enjoyed playing with Harry and letting Harry play with her. It was not until the next day that they made love for the first of what would be many times, thereby preserving Katie's position as the fastest into his bed all the way. Luna showed Harry her apartment on Day Three. It was, Harry thought, very Luna. He would describe it as fanciful. It was the only time they were in there together, although Luna made sure they "christened" her bed, and the couch in the sitting room, and her desk, and the sitting room carpet for good measure. They did not see Neville or Laura until Day Six when they finally left the private apartments and Luna finally wore clothes again (and they learned that Neville and Laura had never left their apartment either. That couple's expression told them what they had been up to for the last five days). It turned out Luna would only wear clothes when they had to leave the apartment. The moment they were alone again, she was naked again. It didn't seem to matter if they did anything or not. Luna later told Harry she just liked being naked around him but couldn't explain why.

Harry learned that Luna had chosen him and Laura Neville because they liked them. Laura, being a Muggle Born, was doing this for much the same reason Katie was. She did not consider the magical dating pool particularly attractive and knew she needed the right husband to have any hopes of a career and, like Katie and Hermione, going back to the Muggle World was not a practical alternative. Luna made her choice because she believed, deep down, that she and Harry could go well together, even in this context. She also had a marriage contract with a man older than her father she wished to avoid if she could.

Harry had come to like all his girls, as he now thought of them and Luna was no exception. She certainly was different than any of the others. Like the others, she was very smart, the top of her class, in fact. But whereas Hermione was one who wanted proof, Luna was definitely willing to take some things on faith, such as the existence of Crumple Horned Snorkacks, Plimpies (although she swears she had caught a few), Nargles, Wrakspurts and other strange creatures. Then again, her father was an amateur naturalist which meant he spent much of his time looking for rare and unknown magical creatures.

The training changed yet again. They were now reviewing Defense Against the Dark Arts and were using international standard books. As Laura said, the only one who actually taught what the I.C.W. considered a proper course in the study was Professor Lupin. While their current professor clearly knew his business, his lessons were pretty much the same for every year which meant Third Years like Luna were not learning about dark creatures as they were supposed to. In addition to the review, they were now studying Arithmancy which was as close to magical science as anything was. It was important in spell analysis and had other uses as well. Again, the two girls achieved their patronus charms by the end of training. Luna's was a hare she named Binky for some reason. Laura's was a huge dog that reminded her of Sammy, her family's pet Newfoundland.

Luna told Harry she was pregnant on Day 25 and as before, they signed their contract that evening. Luna asked Harry to allow it to be a 'voluntary' Line Continuation Contract as, unless her father remarried, she was the last Lovegood. Their oldest son, if he chose to, could become the heir of that Line and name on his twenty-fifth birthday. Harry agreed to this. Laura and Neville would sign their own contract two days later.

"We're allowed to tell you two this," Laura said on their last day after the pictures were up, letters exchanged and the girls received their roses. "As you know, I'm Muggle Born and Luna's a Pureblood which means that you two now have the minimum required for a binding Plural Marriage. But, we are not the last. There will be others."

"How many," Neville said. "Not that I'm complaining, mind you."

"That we've agreed we won't say," Luna said. "By not knowing how many or who's next, we think means you focus your attention on the girl you are with, which is what you should be doing."

"I love you," the two girls told their boys as they turned to leave. The boys returned their expression.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29th, 1995 – SIXTH TIME COMPRESSION.

"Any guesses?" Harry asked.

"Two Hufflepuffs," Neville said. "I'm also guessing one's a Fifth Year and the other's a Third."

"Okay..."

"We each have a Fourth Year from Gryffindor, Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw. We also have a Fifth Year or Third Year from two of those Houses. If I'm going to guess, it will be based on that pattern as we haven't been paired with two Puffs yet and ours are from our year. Other than that, I have no clue."

"Not Slytherin?"

"You expect to see girls from Slytherin?"

"I didn't expect any of this, to be honest."

Two girls entered the Sunroom and each walked up to one of the boys. While Harry recognized them, he couldn't recall their names. The one standing in front of him was about three inches shorter than he was. She had a nice face and nice smile. Her hair was a reddish brown in color and hung past her shoulders, but was not nearly as long as Luna's or Padma's or Hannah's. She had nice, brown eyes. She was wearing Hufflepuff robes with a Prefect's Badge. The other girl was about the same height with long dark hair and blue eyes.

"I'm Marcia Robbins," the Prefect said extending her hand. "Fifth Year Muggle Born, for your records, Harry Potter."

"And I'm Andrea Lee, although Neville here already knows that as he's been tutoring me in Herbology this year."

"Not that you really need the help, Andy," Neville said with the smile.

"You're right," she replied, "but you are the best at it aside from maybe Professor Sprout and I like learning from the best."

"I see you'll have a Prefect too," Neville chuckled.

"A pretty one as well," Harry replied shaking Marcia's hand. "It's nice to meet you, Marcia," he said genuinely.

She smiled at him. "Why don't we retire to our apartments and get to know one another," she suggested.

"That's definitely a plan!" Andy said with glee. "Come on, Neville! Let's check out my rooms!"

The two couples separated. Harry and Marcia took the stairs up to the floor above while Neville and Andy decided to use the lift.

As soon as they entered the main living area, Marcia shed her robes and took off her house tie, unbuttoning the top three buttons of her blouse thereby revealing that she rather well and tastefully endowed. She wasn't as large as Hannah, but larger than most the others so far. Harry was almost surprised that she didn't continue. She sat on one of the couches and Harry sat in a large chair facing her. She then got, crossed over to him and climbed into his lap, straddling his hips so she was facing him and looking him in the eyes.

"This is much nicer, I should think," she said softly and with a smile as she played with his collar.

"Why?" Harry began.

Marcia gave him a false pout. "You don't like me here?"

"No! That's not it! I guess I've gotten used to snuggly girls. I mean, you're all snuggly in minutes! Hermione and Hannah were not. Took a while with them. But everyone else was very - er - affectionate right from the start. Katie and Luna were naked practically from the start."

"Really? Would you like me to be too?"

"It's up to you really."

"Maybe later," she said. "And definitely not before several long, slow, toe curling kisses." She leaned in and kissed him. It was long and slow. "A girl definitely can get very, very used to that," she said when they were finished. "I guess I see your point. To be honest, had I been first or second, I probably would not be here in your lap for some time either."

"Hermione was head over heels for you before she even asked you here. But you know there were issues. You had never had a girlfriend before and you're really a decent guy which meant it would take time for you and Hermione was not about to push you faster than you wanted to go. She had no idea how this would work at all. She had no idea if you'd agree to it or how you'd react. She also had no idea how you might be as more than just her best friend."

"Hannah's shy. She always has been - or at least was until your time with her. I won't say she's not shy anymore, but what happened between the two of you really helped her, if you must know. She liked you before and has known since she was about eight or nine she might well wind up with you because of the contract between your families, but she had no idea what you would be like in a more intimate relationship and no one could tell her. She came in here as blind as Hermione and just as nervous and scared."

"But, when Hermione left, she came back to that classroom you two had been using which was where we were waiting and told us what being with you could be like and it sounded wonderful. While it helps a lot that you're an adorable hunk - especially now as those potions seem to have really done wonders - a lot of boys are really full of themselves. Basically, they're gits. You're not. You talked to them, a lot and not just meaningless words. Once she let's you become intimate, you're said to be very, very good at it. They said you're an amazing kisser, even though most all of them had no experience with that. I don't either but that was a memorable kiss, Harry. I won't say all girls like snuggling, but probably a lot of us do and you don't seem to mind at all. Add to it that everyone who I've heard from agrees that you really know how to please us - and I guess the fact that my first time won't be a quickie in a broom closet but a long, slow time in a nice big, warm bed and you're supposed to be amazing there too, and I guess it's just easier for us."



Harry nodded although not so much in agreement. He really had no idea if this was true. "Prefect?" he continued. "Surely there are rules against that."

"I won't say my badge is not at risk," Marcia said. "But the rules are in my favor. There have been married Prefects before and even ones with children. True, they were Purebloods under old style betrothal contracts..."

"Which seem to be still in style," Harry observed.

"Apparently," Marcia agreed. "The badge is probably more at risk because I am a Muggle Born than anything else. Technically, while we are certainly getting around the rules, we aren't actually breaking any. But we all agree, what we are doing helping you and Neville is far more important than school badges and House Points. If they take it away, it was for the right reasons."

"How do you become Prefect?" Harry asked. "I don't really know how that works."

"The Head of House recommends us and Dumbledore approves. Usually, it's the boy and girl who are highest in their class and House at the end of Fourth Year. There are exceptions. Every once in a while, Dumbledore picks someone else or refuses to offer the badge to the person the Head of House recommended. That's what happened to Katie, I'm told."

"Oh?"

"She second in our entire year. Laura's first. I'm third. The Slytherin Prefect Lucinda Urquhart is fourth. Apparently, Snape had a hissy fit when it looked like three Muggle Borns would be Prefects. Two has happened, but only rarely. Three has never happened and Dumbledore decided one of the Houses had to eat it. McGonagall withdrew Katie's name. I guess she figures Katie is still important as a member of your Quidditch Team and let it go at that. Don't worry. Katie doesn't mind at all, really. Aside from the bathroom, being Prefect is a pain if you ask me and Katie knows that."

"Oh. She never said anything."

"I guess it never came up," Marcia said. "She had a wonderful time with you, Harry and looks forward to being back here. Why would it come up?"

"It's not fair, if you think about it."

Marcia kissed him for that. "No, it's not," she agreed. "I came into this world totally clueless about magic. I gave up the Muggle life freely 'cause this seemed so cool! It's only later we begin to learn the deck is stacked heavily against us here. I could be Head Girl and it won't matter one lick."

"Unless you marry someone like me," Harry nodded. "It shouldn't have to be that way."

"I agree. But it's the hand we're dealt. We all agree that with four Ancient and Noble Houses united and you and Neville being surrounded by some very smart, capable, hopefully powerful and dedicated witches, when all is said and done things will be different, if not for us then for the next generation. That's our long term hope."

For their first time, Harry kissed her. "Then that's what we'll try and do," he said when they broke.

Marcia's rooms were, if anything, the most "girly" Harry had seen yet, although that was probably because her bed was covered in stuffed animal toys and she had a doll collection displayed in the Sitting Room. If that's what she wanted, he didn't mind at all. Of course, it was not like he had to sleep there. Apparently, neither did she. Although it wasn't until Day Three before they moved beyond kissing and cuddling - all the way beyond - during their month together, she slept in his bed. She made her point clear the first day. What they were about to do would be for the rest of their lives in all probability, but this might well be the only time they could spend ages together without her having to share. Harry, of course, didn't mind as this was for all practical purposes their "Honeymoon," even though they were not married yet.

Day 24 and that little detail was all but dealt with as that was when she told him she was pregnant and they signed their contracts. Neville and Andy had beat them to it by two days. But the two couples had a "party" anyway, mostly a nice candlelit dinner and dancing away in the ballroom to follow.

Training was still Arithmancy, physical training (which the girls appreciated - at least the effect it had on the boys) and Defense and, of course, the Patronus Charms. Marcia's was a big cat. She figured probably a jaguar of some kind. Andy's looked like a wolf.

As always, though, their month together all too soon came to an end. More pictures now decorated the Main Floor and Private Apartments and Harry and Neville were soon left alone again as they watched "their girls" leave for now.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29th, 1995 – SEVENTH TIME COMPRESSION.

The two new girls entered. They wore their school robes and ties and it was obvious that they were Slytherins. Harry and Neville both recognized the one who walked up to Neville. The dark hair and almost violet eyes of one of the school famous "Ice Princesses" looked at Neville and a smile broke out on her face.

"Hello, N-Neville," she said.

"Tracey Davis?" he asked.

She nodded. "Contrary to rumors, I do like guys. But you know what kind of them are in Slytherin. Rather marry a sheep or something, to be honest. And I'm not into that either!"

"I ... I ...," Neville began.

"I hope that by the time our time is over, you will know that these robes don't make me evil. I won't bite ... unless, of course, you want me to."

"Rosario Rosier," the shorter red head said. "Though I prefer Rosie, Harry Potter."

He shook her hand. "Can't say we didn't see something like this coming, Rosie," he said. "Just promise us that if there's two Slytherins for each of us, the other two are not Parkinson or Bulstrode."

"You honestly think Hermione would let those two pigs play in her sandbox," Tracey said. "We don't even let them play!"

"Sorry."

"No worries," Rosie said. "We're not evil. Most of the others are total gits, but we like to think we're what Slytherin should be: cunning and ambitious, but not evil."

"Harry?" Neville asked nervously.

"Hermione and Ginny are behind this, Nev," Harry said. "We've gone with it so far. They're just girls, right? Never said a harsh word to you or about you so far as we know. I say we ignore their robes."

"Which we intend to ditch as soon as we get upstairs," Rosie said.

"And hopefully never have to wear again," Tracy added. "Rather it be House Longbottom robes than this rot!"

"Why?" Neville began.

"You've seen our other House mates," Tracy replied. "You really think a sane person wants that? I know nothing much about you, Neville, but if this gets me away from them, I really don't care!"

"Same here," Rosie nodded. "I'm a Third Year, Harry, just so you know. We both want out of that and out of the contracts our families were forced into or are being pressured into. All that is required to make them happy is we marry better than they have or can arrange. Ancient and Noble Houses? That's way better than the likes of the Slytherin boys!"

"Daphne said they're no better than barnyard animals," Tracy nodded. "You ask me, that's an insult to barnyard animals!"

"Please? Give us a chance?" Rosie said with tear forming in her eyes. "Just 'cause Gryffindors hate us doesn't mean we deserve it entirely!"

"Rosier, Harry!" Neville said, "they were Death Eaters!"

"That was my father's First Cousin!" Rosie said. "We broke from that family ages ago! We don't hold with those barbaric ideas!"

"One of the reasons we're outcasts in our own House," Tracy said. "No one has ever called a Slytherin a Blood Traitor, but by that definition, our families are! When this came up, we decided that at least for us it was time to show them our true colors!"

"They're very pretty," Neville began.

"And feisty!" Harry added. "I think I can like them!"

"Okay then," Neville said, "we'll give this a go."

Two girls leapt into the arms of the two boys in front of them.

"Okay," Neville said slowly, "I think this is a first."

Harry chuckled. "They usually wait to get us upstairs."

"Which we should do," Neville nodded. The two boys led the girls away.

Harry and Rosie entered his Private Apartment and he led her to the main living room. She looked sacred.

"Do you want me to strip?" she asked.

"Um ... do you want to?"

"No. Not really. I know I'll have to eventually, but..."

"It's your call, Rosie. It's always the girl's call. Although losing your robe and tie might be an idea."

"A Slytherin would expect me to," she said, "under these circumstances. Thank You." She did take off the robe and tie, however, and unbuttoned her blouse a bit. "So," she said, "I - erm - I like the balcony."

"Then that's where we'll go," Harry replied. He took the younger girl by the hand and led her out to the balcony. Rosie suddenly hugged him and buried her face in his chest.

"You're scared, aren't you?" Harry said.

"Terrified," she replied nodding into his chest.

"Makes two of us then," Harry said softly. "I know if we do this it's forever. It scares the heck out of me. That bloody dragon was nothing compared to what's now happening."

"Oh?"

"We do this, you're my wife. Yes, I have six others now, but it still scares me. My life out of this place - it never taught me how to love or care or be a Dad or Husband. My relatives are not nice people. They never loved me or anything. Snape thinks I'm some kind of spoiled brat, but I never had a decent meal that I can remember before coming here. I was told I didn't deserve it. Detention with Filch is nothing compared to my time with the Dursleys. He's hardly half as scary as he thinks he is. I'm scared because I want to be a good person. I want to be a good Dad, and I know I don't know how."

"You weren't the 'Pampered Prince' as Professor Snape says?"

"I was starved more than half the time, beaten when they felt I needed it or just because I was there and lived in a closet until I came here - and I do mean a closet, not a small room. I'm told most House Elves are treated better than that."

"I ... I didn't know," Rosie began. "Hermione said some things but.."

"I never told her everything," Harry said. "She knows some, but not all. I don't even like thinking about it. I came here, and this was my way out of that life I thought. But every summer Dumbledore sends me back and it's still hell. They tell their neighbors I go to a school for incurable criminal boys! Their son is a criminal, although they would never admit it. Truth is, I'd rather be locked up than sent to them ever again. And now I have children coming? What do I know about that? It scares me, Rosie! What if I turn out as bad as they are?"

"I don't think you can be," Rosie replied. "I admit I barely know you personally, but we've all watched you from time to time and we've heard loads about you almost all year long from girls who really do know you like Ginny and Hermione. You can't be that way because you know it's wrong. You want a family more than anything and you don't consider them a family because they're so wrong about everything. Finally, we won't let you be that way. Should you ever try, you'll have at least seven angry witches there to keep you in line."

Harry smiled. "I suppose you're right."

"Of course I'm right," she laughed. "I'm a woman - or at least I will be once you make me one. You've been with six of us already and with Hermione for years. Haven't you figured that out?"

Harry raised an eyebrow.

"The woman is always right," she giggled. "All good men know that."

"No," Harry chuckled. "It's more like we know it's better not to disagree."

"Prat!" she said, but then kissed him. "But a very cute and kissable one," she said sometime later.

"Why are you doing this?" Harry asked. "And I mean personally. You all begin by talking about what's happened before and this Tournament and how you all think something is terribly wrong. You all add you believe that the Prophecy means something at least and Dumbledore is as much a problem for me as Voldemort, just in a different way and how by helping me - and Neville - we might be able to make a huge difference. But what do you gain from this?"

"Hermione loves me and has wanted to be a big part of my life forever, so she's easy to understand. Hannah has that Line Continuation Contract and, since Hermione was first, I can now keep her family from dying off. Katie thinks I'm smoking hot, she says. But as a Muggle Born, she knows this world is all but closed to her and by coming here she closed the doors in the Muggle World as well and needs to marry well to hope to have a career worthy of her abilities. The same is true for Marcia. And Padma and Luna are getting out of very undesirable marriage contracts. What's in this for you, Rosie?"

"Undesirable marriage contract is one," Rosie said. "I won't say who. It's no longer important except that my parents will probably support this choice because you're a better catch than the bastard they arranged for me. But I also want out of Slytherin House and this is a way out."

"Out?"

"Yes Harry, out! I've never liked it there. Not all of us hold to it's conventions, but we are a minority and the only way to avoid abuse



is to keep our opinions to ourselves, and I don't like that! I don't believe Purebloods are better than everyone! They do and they're fools! Look at the Fifth Year Prefects! The only Purebloods are from Slytherin! Had Katie Bell been named, three of the eight would have been Muggle Borns! My year is an exception that Snape holds out as proof! Three out of the top four students are Purebloods! But our Number Two is a Muggle Born. In your year, the only Pureblood in the top four is Daphne Greengrass and she's third! Hermione's first and it's not even close! Fifth Years, three of the top four are Muggle Borns. The only Pureblood is Lucinda Urquhart. Superior? Rubbish."

"I tend to agree," Harry said. "Then again, with Hermione as a best friend it's hard to see it the Pureblood way at all. Still ... you do know that the Sorting Hat really, really wanted to put me in Slytherin."

Rosie's jaw dropped. "It did?"

Harry nodded. "Kept trying to convince me to go there. I kept telling it anywhere but there and it finally relented."

"So you hated my House even then?"

"Didn't know a thing about it except that Malfoy was in it. I'd already met him and decided he was nothing but bad news and wanted to be as far away from him as I could get."

"He's among the worst of the lot," Rosie said. "But most are not much better. I suppose I dislike the entire House system. I mean, I understand it kind of. Quidditch would be less interesting without it and the House Cup is supposed to encourage students to behave and work hard and without House pride, it'd be useless. But aside from that, it divides us - all of us. Even in the other Houses, most don't have friends outside their House. Most that do knew them before they started. I guess Neville is the major exception. He has a gift with plants and helps people with Herbology mostly without regard to House. Although," she smirked, "he was asked to help Malfoy and his friends who are terrible at it and told Professor Sprout he'd stop tutoring everyone if he was forced to accept them."

"Us Slytherins? We don't have friends outside of our House. It's not allowed."

"But you are now..."

"We decided it was worth it to effectively tell our Housemates to shove it. And we don't care what Snape thinks either. It's wrong, he's wrong, end of discussion."

"How does marrying me help that?" Harry asked.

"As married students, the rules say we're allowed separate quarters."

"All of us?"

"So far as we've been able to determine, you and Neville are the first to have a Plural Marriage while in school. There are family quarters here of a sort. They are separate from the other dorms. Right now, there are no married couples in school. But every couple of years there's at least one. According to the books, those quarters have a bedroom for the couple, a 'common room' and a bathroom. There are supposedly spare rooms for children, but since the mandatory use of Contraceptive Potions began well over a hundred years ago, those rooms haven't been used. But by being married, we get out of the dorms."

"Doesn't sound like much," Harry said. "I mean, I have six for certain already and that seems cramped."

Rosie nodded. "But then, we have this Wing! Bent some rules to be sure, but it is built for our purposes now. Each of us have our private apartment within the family's Private Apartment. You've seen the others, I suppose?"

Harry nodded. "Same, yet all very different."

"We each decorated to our tastes, but yes if you take out the furnishings and such they are identical in all respects. We have our bedroom, closet, bath - two actually - sitting room, study, spare closet and nursery."

"Nursery?" Harry asked. He really had not thought about that. "But that's months away!"

"We're all going to have a child when all is said and done. I can't speak for the others, but at first our baby will sleep in my room. But

we'll be here until all of us are finished with school which, for me, is four years from now and the children will need their own room at some point."

"I only saw Hermione's and she said it was a spare, but it's pretty big if you ask me."

"It's their playroom too," Rosie said.

"And - I'm surprised I hadn't thought of this before - what are these children going to do while we're in class? I doubt the Professors will let them come with us."

"Some might," Rosie said. "Can't say. Most won't. I'd really not want to bring a baby into Snape's class - or any other class with Slytherins. They'd probably do something bad. But that's what House Elves can do."

"House elves?" Harry asked.

Rosie nodded. "They're very good with young children."

"But we only have two! Dobby and Winky!"

"Actually, we have fourteen here now. Many of us have our own Elves here. They're our friends and we couldn't not let them be a part. If Neville brings his personal elves, it'll be sixteen. Four boy elves and the rest girls and the girls tend to the young children in the better magical homes. My Ellena is actually looking forward to it and - before you ask - she is my bonded Elf, not my parents so our secrets are safe with her, including this."

"Why haven't I seen them?" Harry asked.

"Elves generally are not seen, Harry. They do their work unseen. But ... Ellena?" she called.

An elf popped in front of them. It was a female, judging by the light yellow dress.

"Harry, this is my Elf and friend Ellena," Rosie said. "She's been a big part of my life for as long as I can remember. Ellena? This is the gentleman I told you of."

"It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Master Potter," the elf said with a slight bow. "I look forward to serving my Rosie and your family."

Harry was stunned. "You - you don't talk like Dobby or Winky."

"Of course not," Rosie and Ellena replied in unison.

"Not every family is like the Malfoys and Crouchs," Rosie said. "We treat our friends with respect. The broken English is a sign of abuse for them. Just wanted you to meet him, Ellena," she added and the Elf popped away. She turned to Harry. "In time, Dobby will speak that way as well. The other elves are very impressed with how you and Hermione have taken Dobby and Winky into your lives. Although Ellena does say that Dobby will probably always wear mismatched socks."

"Oh?"

"You saw to it his former bond was broken when you tricked Malfoy Senior into giving his Elf a sock. It wouldn't work for me to try that. You have to hate the elf or at least so dislike them that you want to be rid of them for clothes to break the bond. The Malfoys hate most everything, so good prank on your part, Harry."

"And the socks?"

"According to Ellena and the other Elves, one symbolizes the sock that freed him from those vile people. The other symbolizes his bond to you. As the two are different, so are the socks and none of the Elves here consider his display unworthy, given the circumstances."

Harry could not respond right away. It was one of those annoying, emotional things.

Rosie's rooms were - well - flowery. The furniture was flowery, the upholstery was, the curtains were, the bed linens were, and so was the wallpaper, or whatever. Harry thought it was tasteful, bright and airy in a way, not that he wanted his room to look the same. Each of his girl's rooms were very different and, as he had learned so far, very them. Rosie was sunny in many ways and to see her rooms so like this made sense. It was her.

Harry "made her a woman" as she put it on their fourth day together. They had worked up to it, progressing from kissing - which she eagerly engaged in on day one - to more and more and more as she was ready. Harry had told her the girl set the pace and Rosie learned Harry was totally serious about that - and totally wonderful. She knew she had made a very good choice in agreeing to do this. She was not alone. When they finally met Neville and Tracey for breakfast on Day Six, the first of their training days, it was obvious Tracey was head over heels. That the two Gryffindors had overlooked their House and let them become who they were becoming only made it that much more special for Rosie and Tracey.

Training changed. They had finished with Arithmancy for now and those exams waited to be marked by Professor Vector. Their non-wand material was now a potions review, and given they had Snape for a professor, any review in a less stressful environment (especially given the point system the girls came up with) was welcome. For wand work, Neville continued to use Ginny's wand as it worked well enough for him. Now they had moved on to dueling and the "evil" Slytherins were teaching them hexes and curses, some of which were probably borderline dark, but quite useful in a duel. They were not yet matching up against an opponent, just the practice dummies in the spell casting training room. As with the girls before them, Rosie and Tracy would achieve their patronus by the end of their month. Rosie's would be an eagle and Tracy's a wolf.

Harry was in the library on the Training Floor and looking through the well organized shelves. Something told him Hermione had something to do with this because it was easy to find things despite the huge number of books. When in doubt, though, all he or anyone had to do was call Winky. Hermione's Elf was the resident librarian and in Harry's opinion, Madam Pince - the school librarian - could take lessons from the little Elf. He was looking up books on dueling when he came across it. It was a manuscript of some kind, Rosie told him. It was clearly never published before. Unlike even the oldest books he had seen at Hogwarts, this was neither printed by a press nor the work of a scribe. There was no calligraphy. It was written as one would write a letter or a personal journal.

"It looks like a grimoire," Rosie said looking over his shoulder.

"A what?"

"It's not from one of our families and a few of them are in here," she said. "If it is, it's a book of private, family magic that is passed down through the generations. A lot of the magic in those kinds of books isn't terribly private, just tips on doing it better. But any grimore is still treasured. What family is it?"

"It doesn't really say," Harry began.

Rosie read it.

The Art of Dueling

I, Argus Caldwell hereby dedicate this to my Great-great Granddaughter Lana Caldwell, last of my line in honor of her acceptance to Hogwarts this 30th Day of June, 1710. These are the true secrets to my success, My Child. Use it well.

"Bloody hell!" Rosie said. She sprinted off into the bookshelves.

"Eeep!" another female voice cried, and Harry saw Tracey doing the same thing.

Neville had been sitting across from him. "What the bloody hell was that about?"

Harry shrugged and chuckled. "We're on our seventh girls, all of them brilliant and beautiful and - well I don't know about you - but talkative..."

"They are that," Neville nodded. "Not that I mind a bit."

"And I still can't say I understand women at all."

"Perhaps we're not meant to understand them," Neville replied. "Not completely, anyway. Perhaps we're merely meant to try to and appreciate them while we try."

"That actually makes sense of this whole thing," Harry chuckled.

"Which is what I've been trying to do all along, Mate. Me! Neville Longbottom! I never saw this coming, not in a million years! I take Ginny to the Ball and now, a few months later - outside - she's my

wife for all practical purposes and I have five more and maybe six? I don't understand this at all. Maybe I never will. But it is - er - interesting to try."

"It is indeed."

"They're all scary smart," Neville continued. "Hermione's probably the smartest, but the rest are scary smart as well. We've got the top four Third Years between us and three of the top four Fifth Years and I'm betting that Slytherin Prefect is a part of this as well. All of our Fourth Years are top ten in the class. And they're all lookers, if you know what I mean!"

Harry nodded. "They are that."

"Course, I know better than to try and win an argument with them unless I'm really, really prepared, but I do love my girls."

"Me too," Harry nodded just as Tracy and Rosie returned with some books and began pouring through them for the next few hours while Harry and Neville studied potions.

"Argus Caldwell!" Rosie said after that few hours. "Auror and Master Duelist. Lived from 1567 to 1712 and died in his sleep of old age, rare for that apparently. It says here he holds the record for the most consecutive competition dueling wins and never, ever lost a real one - one to the death. During his life, many thought he had a special wand, but it turned out it was just a regular Ollivander wand which is now displayed at the shop - the unicorn hair core removed in accordance with his will. He always maintained it was his ideas about magic that made him what he became - ideas he never taught but was said to have passed on to his children, yet nothing seems to have come of it. Harry! This is what he passed on!"

"What's it doing in Hogwarts?" Neville asked. "It's not any of you girls' family magic is it?"

"No idea, Neville, and no it's not. The ones we brought only we can remove from the shelves here. You know that's the way it usually works!"

Neville nodded. For Harry, of course, this was all new. It was explained to him that those kind of books could only be read by family.

"Does the book have a Hogwarts stamp?" Rosie asked Harry.

At least he knew what that meant. All the library books had a stamp in them on their inside cover that had the school crest showing it was property of the school. He checked. "There isn't one."

"She must have lost it," Rosie said.

"Who?" Harry asked.

"The Lana in the book! It says he was planning to give it to her and she was becoming a First Year. She must have either lost it or hid in in the Library! It wasn't donated or confiscated by a teacher or such or it'd have the stamp! This might be an important find!"

"Technically it's a family grimore," Neville said. "Technically, we shouldn't even look at it without their permission! It might not be the law, but it is the respected tradition!"

"In which case," Tracey said looking up from her own books and notes, "you probably can debate which of you is family."

"What are you on about, Trace?" Neville said firmly, although there was a smile that told her he was not really questioning her, just asking her to explain, which she now understood.

"Lana Caldwell, the Great-great Granddaughter of the duelist, to whom that book was dedicated and arguably given, married Edmund Potter in 1721. They had two children who had families that survive to this day. Their son William is Harry's ancestor and their daughter Agnes married one Harris Longbottom..."

"Bloody hell!" Neville exclaimed. "That's one of my ancestors!"

"Until now, no one else bothered to read more than the title," Rosie said. "Hermione said she found it stuffed behind some dusty books and it looked useful. But if Tracey's right - and it seems she is - only a blood descendant or their wives or husbands could read it at all!"



"But..." Harry began.

Rosie stood and muttered a charm and her belly glowed in a golden light. Tracy did the same, it seemed, for the result was the same and the two girls were smiling. It was Day 21.

"We're both pregnant," Rosie said with a smile. A smile that led to kisses for both girls and a romantic, candle lit dinner as was now the custom and the contracts and the pictures on the wall and finally the letters and roses on their last day together.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29th, 1995 – EIGHTH TIME COMPRESSION.

"Your guess this time," Neville said as they sadly watched Rosie and Tracey leave them.

"For me, my bet it Greengrass and for you it's that Prefect. Urquhart, I think."

"You're reasoning?" Neville said.

"The other six. We each have a Fourth Year from the other Houses but I'm short one from Slytherin. We each have two girls from the other Houses, but only one from our year. The other is either a Third Year or Fifth Year. In my case, I now have two of each, but you're short your Fifth Year. Then add to it the one's who we do have are all scary smart and very, very pretty. We have the top four Third Years in the school and three of the top four Fourth Years between us and we know who the other two are: Greengrass and Urquhart. That and I'd doubt Hermione or Ginny would have anything to do with the other Fourth Year Slytherin girls."

"Good point," Neville said. The bell sounded indicating Time Compression had been reactivated. "We'll see if you're right."

Soon, two blonde girls in Slytherin robes entered. The one with the Prefect's Badge walked up to Neville and the almost statuesque one with no expression on her face walked up to Harry. Harry was proven right.

"Lucinda Urquhart," the Prefect said to Neville. "My true friends call me Lucy."

"It is a pleasure to meet you, Lucy," Neville said taking her hand and bowing slightly.

"Daphne," the other said to Harry.

"Nice to meet you, Daphne," Harry said taking her hand.

"So what happens now?" Daphne asked nervously.

"You don't know?" Harry replied.

"And we were led to believe our other girls told you everything," Neville chuckled. "Well, the custom now is I take my date up to our apartments and Harry takes his to theirs whereupon our dates have their way with us."

"Or not," Harry added. "Neville and I are gentlemen and we do or do not as our lady desires."

With that the two couples separated and headed off to their quarters hand in hand. When Harry and Daphne entered the Potter apartments and the main living room, she let go of his hand and looked around. Harry could tell she was looking at the pictures of the others with him on the wall. She then hung her Slytherin robes on a convenient coat rack and her tie and unbuttoned the top of her collar. She spent a moment looking at the seven photographs on the wall.

"What do you think about all of this, H-Harry?" Daphne asked.

Harry chuckled. "To be honest, after Hermione told me about this and I realized that this was probably the only way to gain control over my life, I tried not to. I figured that it was more important to focus on the girl I was with then than dwell on ... well, all of this. Then again, at that time I was thinking it would be four girls total, not eight and counting."

"It will only be nine," Daphne said.

"Really? I thought you weren't supposed to tell me too much."

Daphne turned and looked at him. "Hermione told me I could tell you that and some other things. But I'm not allowed to tell you who she is."

"Great! It had finally reached the point where we could guess and now I have no clue."

"Guess?"

"Neville and I recently noticed a pattern. We were each getting two girls from each House, one a Fourth Year and the other being either a Third or Fifth Year. Each was among the smartest in their years and each was also very pretty. After Rosie and Tracy continued that pattern, it was almost easy to guess that you and ... it's Lucinda, right?" Daphne nodded. "That the two of you were next. We had already learned she was in the top four in her year and we already had the top four Third Years and you're in the top four in our year, and along with Tracy one of the two Slytherin girls who's a beauty."

"Pansy's not too hard on the eyes," Daphne countered.

"And you don't seem to hate our guts," Harry added.

"You were almost wrong," Daphne said.

"Oh?"

"Originally, Tracy and I were to become yours if we went through with this. Rosie would have been Neville's."

"What changed?"

"We're women. We reserve the right to change our minds," Daphne chuckled. "Actually, we Slytherins talked about it. We each have our reasons for agreeing to be here in principal. In part, we saw the same pattern you did and thought it wise to continue that. But the real reason was to stick it to Malfoy. I don't think he knows Rosie exists and he can't stand or stand up to Lucy, so neither of them are on his list."

"List?"

"Girls he takes into his bed. There are three he beds regularly. Parkinson is one, Bulstrode..."

"Gah! You've got to be kidding!"

Daphne shook her head. "Considering he swings both ways and shags his goons as well..."

"There's an image I don't need at all! That's even worse!"

"Despite that, he wants to add to his collection," Daphne said, "and Tracy and I are high on his list of collectables. We haven't given him a chance and have hexed him several times for pressing the issue. It doesn't seem to discourage the bastard. One of our reasons is to shove this in his nose. The only thing worse than turning down his advances would be to do so in favor of boys he hates on sight. We decided the only thing that would infuriate him more than the both of us with you is if one of us was with Neville. To lose us to the two of you ... well, he might finally begin to question his manhood," she added with a chuckle. "Besides, Tracy thinks she's a better fit with Neville and Rosie was already thinking the same way about you."

"I hope there is more to what you're doing than sticking it to the git."

"That was a minor reason," Daphne said with a smile. "It's a fun one, to be sure, but not really all that important to us. It is not the reason why I chose this. Like I suppose everyone else, we believe this is the right thing to do, even though the easy thing would be not to do it at all. But I think each of us has a personal reason beyond that."

Harry nodded. "They all have. A contract?"

Daphne shook her head. "I'm not under contract. Not yet. In a way, I'm doing this for my family."

"Oh?"

"I was born in January 1980 during the war. My family did not support You-Know-Who or the Death Eaters and managed to keep a low enough profile not to attract their attention. It had been the custom in my family to marry outside of the British magical aristocracy, usually someone from the continent. My Mum is from France. Until me, the Greengrasses had managed to have about four generations with boys and no girls. My Dad thinks they were using a specialized potion to do that, but does not know for certain.

"When I eighteen months old, the Death Eaters finally took note of us. They weren't winning the war. They weren't losing, but they weren't winning and ... Anyway, they started putting pressure on us neutrals. They wanted money, more Death Eaters and political and social connections that might swing the balance back to them. In the case of my family, they put pressure on my father to betroth me to one of their sons. He managed to stall them long enough for - for that night to occur and the war to end.

"My sister Astoria was born after You-Know-Who fell. Within the last few months, certain old Death Eater families have begun pressuring Dad again about marriage contracts for me and Astoria. Specifically, the Flints want me and the Notts want Astoria. We want nothing to do with them at all, but Dad thinks their efforts mean something bad is about to happen. Knowing what I do now about that Prophecy and your experiences with You-Know-Who, I would agree that it looks like he's coming back and his former supporters know this.

"By marrying you, I'm off the market. More importantly, it would make an alliance between my family and an Ancient and Noble House."

"How does that help?"

"If I marry before any contracts are made for me or my sister, the alliance means that you have control of her fate."

"You want me to marry..." Harry began.

"No! She is not one of us. She is only a Second Year and a young one at that. She won't turn thirteen until May. But the alliance gives you the right to approve marriage contracts of the allied families. Arguably, it gives you that right for all marriages, but the custom has been that the Senior House did not involve itself in marriages by consenting adults based upon their own wishes. Basically, when you and I are married, Astoria can't be forced to marry into a House that stands in opposition to yours."

Harry thought about it for a moment. "Wait a tic, I can't believe I didn't think of this sooner! If Voldemort comes back, by even associating with me your lives are in danger! I'm his priority target and he'll try and get you as well! All this time, I've been waiting for the shoe to drop! I never had good luck before and..."

"HARRY, STOP IT!" Daphne yelled. That got his attention. "You think your luck is bad? You have had two of the most powerful wizards alive trying to ruin your life since before you were born, yet you're alive and are actually one of the most decent people at this school. Considering how your deck has been stacked against you, I'd say your luck is surprisingly good!

"As for placing us in danger, what makes you think we're in any more danger than before?"

"I don't understand."

"Hermione has a target on her back just for being your friend. Not that it really matters. She's a Muggle Born and if the Death Eaters returned, she's a target just for that reason. They killed Muggle Borns for sport! In their view, Muggle Borns are an abomination who don't deserve to live! The rest of us are from families that refused to support You-Know-Who or openly opposed him! We all lost family to him and his followers during the last war! My Uncle was killed by his Death Eaters for refusing them! Do you think they'll forgive us?"

Harry shook his head.

"We all know this might place us in more imminent danger if he returns. But we'd be in grave danger in any event, even if we never heard of Harry Potter! Get over yourself!"

"Still..."

"There's no still! We're all doing this because we believe that it's the right thing to do; that under the circumstances, this is the best use of our lives, minds and talents not just right now, but for years and years to come! We also believe that in the end being with you and Neville makes us safer should the worst happen. It makes our families safer!"

"How?"

"You have any idea how powerful you and Neville are?"

Harry shook his head.

"Let's just say, we have good reason to believe that you and Neville may well be the two most magically powerful wizards alive today."

"But Dumbledore..."

"Is a powerful wizard magically. He's also powerful politically - which is a power neither you nor Neville have yet and it's something we plan to work on over time. But what really makes Dumbledore scary is skill. He's been studying magic for well over a hundred years, Harry. There are very few who have done that - ever! Merlin probably did. Nicholas Flamel is said to have as well. The Founders probably did, if they lived as long which we don't know. Most witches and wizards stop at some point - many not long after they finish school. Dumbledore never stopped! Neither did You-Know-Who, apparently, but he's sixty years or more behind Dumbledore which is probably why he fears the Old Man! But in terms of raw magical potential, you and Neville have them both beaten!

"Neville's been passing his practicals with a wand that is only slightly better for him than any other stick of wood! That means he's scary powerful! In your case - well there are far too many examples. The best one, though is the Patronus Charm! You mastered that at thirteen!"

"So did Ginny," Harry protested. "The only one lacking a corporeal Patronus so far is Neville and we're convinced it's his wand!"

"We don't know if she's mastered it," Daphne replied. "She's never faced a Dementor and that's the real test isn't it? You drove off well over a hundred of them with one cast! The people who know are not certain if anyone could do that! Add to the fact a lesser known point: according to Susan who heard it from her Aunt who's head of DMLE, the Department that runs Azkaban and supposedly controls those things, some of the Dementors were destroyed that night! That's never happened as far as anyone knows!

"If it every came down to raw power, you'd wipe the floor with any witch or wizard with the possible exception of Neville - assuming he gets a new wand, of course. But power is meaningless! Skill trumps power all the time! And that's what you lack! Your time here has not been just about getting to know us and making babies, has it?"

"No. Not that I'm complaining about that bit."

"Boys!" she muttered. "We've been helping you two learn and perfect everything we can! Hermione came up with that plan and from what I've heard it's working! While I'd like to think that the two of you could never knock me out of the top four, from what I've heard you might well be able to give me a run for my money! By the time this real day is over, you two will have completed everything through the end of this year in those studies, and probably do quite well on any exams. But we're not done with you yet, Harry Potter! Not by a long shot!

"Once this phase of Hermione's plan is done, we'll all be together again. As we speak, Hermione and Ginny are trying to figure out what to do about the Weasley Twins birthday bash. Do we all go? Could be a problem for us Slytherins. There's also the problem that you have grown. You're probably six inches taller than you were this morning and certainly - er - hunkier. We can only hope that most people lack observational skills.

"April 2nd, the lot of us are going to Diagon Alley. It's the Hols, so as long as we're back before curfew, we can leave. We need to go to Gringotts about the marriages and then so that you and Neville can go over your family accounts. It won't be too detailed, just an overview as I understand it. We then need to get Neville a proper wand from Ollivanders and we all probably need to do some shopping."

"For what?"

"Clothes for one! We're all bigger than we were when this began and while we can alter what we have magically, those alterations don't last! That and we girls need - er - maternity clothes. Then there's your wardrobe. It really needs work, Harry."

Harry nodded. It was hard to disagree since aside from his school robes and such, what he wore was what his relatives provided which was pathetic, to say the least. The grossly oversized Dudley hand-me-downs would never fit properly. He was taller, not wider. The others were stuff from second hand stores - although Harry would not be a bit surprised to learn if his Aunt had picked at least some of them out of the odd dustbin.



"Then there's baby stuff: clothes, cribs, prams, nappies, bottles and the like."

Harry paled slightly.

"Don't worry, Harry," Daphne laughed, "you and Neville can skip that bit. But it might be a good idea to check out the toy stores."

"That sounds fine," Harry sighed in relief.

"And books of course," Daphne continued. "Hermione says there's no such thing as too many of those. And she wants to head out to Muggle London as well. Again, for books and clothes. That sounds like fun!"

Harry rolled his eyes.

"Toy stores," Daphne grinned and Harry smiled. "We figure the shopping may well take us into Friday as well," she continued. "That works in a way as our guests begin to arrive then."

"G-Guests?"

Daphne laughed. "Of course! What do you think the upper two floors are for? We're going to spend the weekend in Time Compression. Not the whole time, but at least fifteen hours and we're doing it during daylight as now. Given that in fifteen months that means the babies will be born and may be at least six months old by the end of the hols, we need Healers. We have two coming. Lisa's Dad is one and the other is named Ted Tonks, who's a friend of Rosie's and Hannah's families. Well, his wife is the real friend and she's coming too. That and we've invited some Professors."

"Please don't tell me Snape is one."

"Why would anyone invite him anywhere?" Daphne said. "Lisa's Mum is a Potions Mistress. We invited them because Hermione hopes that by the end of that Time Compression, we can all sit for our O.W.L.s at the very least. That would allow all of us to drop those courses at least for this year so we can focus on our children and training and such."

"That would be useful."

"And then there're the families," Daphne continued.

"Wh-what?"

"Harry, even in the Muggle world it is considered appropriate that the young man meets the family of his intended bride, usually before they marry."

"Great! They're going to kill me!"

"We won't let that happen," Daphne laughed. "It would be bad form to kill our husband and the father of their grandchild. Besides, I'm sure that once my parents get over the initial shock, they'll see the merits of this and I know they will come to love you."

"Hermione's parents," Harry began.

"Will be in our world, won't they? Hermione thinks they'll accept it in the end. Kind of hard not to, if you think about it. They will be here for a weekend outside, but all through her pregnancy, delivery and the early months of the child's life. Besides, you won't be alone."

"You're not inviting the Dursleys! No way!"

"Not them," Daphne smiled, "your godfather and Professor Lupin."

"Will it be safe for him?" Harry asked meaning Sirius.

"We think so," she replied. "The wards control entry and exit. Only those we allow in can enter and they need our permission to leave. It is our hope that by the time the hols are over, there'll be a lot of people demanding he gets his chance at a trial. Before then, even if they wanted to, they can't run off for Aurors and even if they could, the Aurors can't get in. These are keyed wards, Harry. If you're not keyed into them, you can't break them and as all the warding runes are inside the Wing, you can't get at them to break them. It would take an army of curse breakers to pull down these wards from the outside. We are about as safe here as we could be anywhere."

"And Professor Lupin's - er - problem? We have a place for that?"

"His lycanthrope is tied to the lunar cycle, Harry. He can only transform under a full moon and it's not until the 16th, long after we're through with this."

"Oh."

Before this had begun, while Daphne wanted to be a full part of this, she did have an image to maintain. She was known as the "Ice Princess" and wanted to keep up the persona just a little while longer. Her plan was to stay out of Harry's bed until Day 11, one day longer than anyone else. She could afford to wait that long as she would not begin to approach peak fertility until Day 14. In the end, she failed miserably. She decided that four days was more than enough and never regretted that decision because Harry was even better at that than the others had said. She already had begun to really enjoy his company, but that last bit was too amazing for words. One Day 24, the inevitable result of her new passions was revealed as she too was now expecting and, as per custom, the two signed their contract that night, one day after Neville and Lucinda.

Training continued as before with Potions and what they were now calling Dueling. In that regard, Harry and Neville had come to believe Caldwell's book was a work of genius. None of the other books on dueling compared really. And some of the things he suggested were possible, with the right magical training, seemed unbelievable, but he had anecdotes to back it up which could be compared to other writings about his duels. Physical training was a major part of his work, which differed from all the other texts but was also something the boys had already been working on for months. For the girls, their major training was the patronus charm, which they both managed by Day 25. Lucinda's was a wild boar. Daphne's was a flamingo, which she admitted she always had liked.

The time seemed to fly by for Harry and the others and soon their month together was up. The traditions continued with the pictures, letters and Roses. Then their time caught up with real time and the two girls, dressed again in their school robes, kissed their boys and left.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29th, 1995 – NINTH TIME COMPRESSION.

Harry and Neville had no clue who the next and last girls might be. Their best guess was Gryffindors, but neither of them believed it. They already had the best ones and the only others even close, in Harry's opinion, were his other two teammates, both of whom were rumored to be dating the Weasley Twins.

Two girls entered the Sunroom dressed in the light blue robes of Beauxbatons. The taller one had dark hair and eyes and almost olive skin. The shorter one was a stunningly beautiful blonde, not that her companion was not beautiful in her own right.

"Okay," Harry said.

"This is unexpected," Neville added.

The tall, dark haired girl was Michelle Marcella. She had been born Maria Tracci in a village in Italy located somewhere between Rome and Naples. Her birth parents were Muggles, she said. Before she was two years old she began expressing accidental magic and apparently her birth parents feared she was possessed by evil spirits. They took her to her parish priest and demanded an exorcism. The priest was not trained in such matters and forwarded the request to Rome.

Some months later, the terrified couple was visited by a man from Rome who they thought was from the Church. In fact, the man was from the Italian Magical Ministry. It was the policy of that government to remove children from homes where they might be at risk as in situations where the parents were Muggles and could not be taught not to fear magic. The man left the village with the little girl and she was soon adopted by the Marcellas, a magical couple who lived up north near the Italian Alps and who had been unable to have children of their own.

Michelle had been told this when she was young, although it did not really matter to her. Her adoptive parents loved her very much. Although she was raised in a magical home and within the magical world, her parents did not completely shun the Muggle World. She had been to the cinema and theaters and enjoyed skiing near her home and trips to the coast in the summer. While her parents were Italian, they had gone to Beauxbatons, which was actually closer to

where they lived than the Italian magical school and that was where Michelle was sent. She was now in her Fourth Year.

She said that while she lived in Italy, her family was closest with a family in France. They were not related, but had known each other for a long time and often visited and vacationed together. The other girl, despite being a year behind her in school, was Michelle's best friend and had been for as long as she could remember. She was the reason Michelle agreed to this, for this way they could remain friends and see each other often for the rest of their lives.

"I am Gabrielle Delacour," the other girl said.

"But ...," Harry protested, "but you can't be! Only a few months ago you were - what? - eight or nine."

"I am fourteen," she said. "I was thirteen when I was in ze lake. I only looked younger."

"I don't understand."

Like her sister, Garbeille was Veela. It was a common and unfortunate misconception that Veela were some sort of magical being akin to goblins and elves. They were not. They were fully human. Veela was a form of magic that passed from mother to daughter. Unlike other magicals, while Veela's could be "Half Bloods," they never were Muggle Born.

Veela girls were born with a natural affinity for two of the four elements: air and fire. They also expressed their natural (as in accidental) magic based upon two emotions: love and anger. Their love magic was based upon the air element while their anger magic was based upon fire.

Veela magic was very powerful. While Veela would and could use wands, they had a natural ability for at least limited forms of wandless magic, specifically those forms associated with the air and fire elements. They also were natural occlumens, which might also explain some of the prejudices as the only other humans with a common natural occlumency were werewolves. The difference was Veela were born with it where as it was part of the Were affliction within werewolves.

She explained that because the magic can be so powerful, young Veela instinctively suppress it. Like all magical children, they still have their outbursts, but it would be much worse if the magic was not naturally suppressed. It does not release until the Veela was magically and emotionally mature enough to be able to learn to handle it. This usually occurs between the ages of fourteen and sixteen. Until then, the Veela girl remains a girl. She does not mature sexually at all. When the suppression lifts, the girl goes through a rapid growth spurt that usually lasts about two weeks. During that time, her body catches up with her age.

Until then, the little Veela is just a magical girl. When she goes through "the change" which she said was basically a very rapid puberty, the final Veela traits can become manifest. One was the anger and fire based trait that Harry had seen at the World Cup - the winged being. Gabrielle told them that the Winged Veela was little more than a natural form of animagus transformation although unlike others who develop the skill, Veela could not control when the transformation occurred. It could only occur when they were very angry or threatened.

The other uniquely Veela trait was called the Allure. This was love and air based magic and a major source of annoyance for Veela and other witches. This was what made many men act very silly around Veela and seem to fall for the witch immediately. It also made other witches very jealous of the ability to attract men and it did not help that Veela were always very pretty to begin with. Gabrielle told them that the Allure was a means with which the Veela could tell a potentially desirable man from the vast majority who would be incompatible. Veela were not attracted to men affected by their Allure. They were naturally attracted to men who were not. This also caused problems and explained some of the prejudices because if a man was truly in love with another woman, the Allure would not affect him and that might attract the Veela to him.

The Allure was something like a magical test, Gabrielle said. It was their way of finding the best possible mate. Their magic sought the man who would be a suitable life partner for them. Fortunately, while the Veela may be confused by a man's lack of interest because he was already bonded to another and she did not know that, her magic could not be. When her magic found that man, a bond would begin to form. She would know it almost immediately. In addition to otherwise unexplainable feelings for the man, her Allure would begin

to fade away. Once the Allure was gone completely, the Veela would be bonded to that man. The problem was the man could reject her. Usually, the Veela knows this will happen before it is too late, before the bond forms and she can move on.

"But zere are occasions when zis does not happen," Gabrielle said. "Sometimes, ze bond forms before ze Veela can know if ze man will be hers or not."

"What happens then?" Harry asked.

"It is not too 'orrible, I suppose," Gabrielle said. "I would remain a witch, but I would lose my Veela powers and while I could marry another and have children, zey would not be Veela. My Veela line would come to an end. Zere are so few of us, however, zat zis is not a desired outcome."

"I take it you're here because of this bond?"

Gabrielle nodded and began to cry. "I did not mean for zis," she said. "None of zis should 'ave 'appened. I should not 'ave been able to bond with you so soon if ever."

"What happened?"

"Ze Second Task," Gabrielle began after she calmed down a little. "I was thirteen zen. My birthday was not until March four. I should not 'ave changed for several more months, maybe even a year. But it 'appened. Maman thinks it was ze task. It was ze water! We can swim. But ze magic put upon me as 'ostage and ze water ... water and air do not mix and water kills fire. My magic was fading and 'ad it faded, I would 'ave drowned! You saved my life quite literally, 'Arry. Maman thinks I 'ad but minutes left when I came to ze surface. My change began almost immediately an' I think the first thing was I bonded to you."

"After ze task, I could not stop thinking about you. We only met for a moment and I would dream about you every night and need to see you and hoped you would like me. Zat is a sign of ze bonding! I never even 'eard about you before aside from a newspaper saying you were in ze Tournament with my sister under suspicious circumstances."

"The Boy Who Lived is a English fascination," Michelle said. "You're not nearly as famous in France. That was an English war and so long as it remained an English war, France paid little attention to it. Had it crossed the Channel, it would have been very different but your terrorists were unable to do so because we kept them out. Here, you are famous. There, you are a trivia question."

Harry chuckled. "Maybe I should move to France. So," he said looking at Gabrielle, "you're bonded to me?"

Gabrielle nodded.

"Hermione convinced me it was important to accept every girl who came through that door - at least the ones who came through for me. They could refuse, but I agreed not to if they chose to do this. If this is what you want, Gabrielle, then this is the way it will be."

"Merci!" she exclaimed and hugged herself to him.

"So," Neville said, "does this mean Harry has to deal with one of those bird things if she gets angry with him?"

"No," Michelle answered for her friend who seemed to relieved to speak. "Like the Allure, if she had that ability it fades upon bonding at least when it comes to her Bondmate. When they make love for the first time, the Allure and Avian form will be gone from her forever. She will retain all her other Veela gifts so he does have to be concerned about her affinity for fire magic. She will be able to conjure it with ease."

"Anything else I should know?" Harry asked.

Gabrielle nodded into his chest. "As I will remain Veela, I can only bear you daughters. It is one of ze reasons we do get rejected. I can never bear you a son."

"Given my circumstances, I don't see that as much of a problem," Harry said.

"Hold on," Neville said. "If water was so dangerous to you, why were you there?"



Gabrielle began by explaining she and Michelle were part of the group that had come over for the Tournament. Beauxbatons had brought four Seventh Years who submitted their names, but their Headmistress felt others should attend as well as it would be a good experience, she thought. Two students were selected from Third through Sixth Year based upon their skills in English and class standings. Gabrielle was one of the two Third Years and Michelle was one of the two Fourth Years.

Apparently, while Dumbledore had selected the hostages for Harry and Cedric, it was Karkaroff who selected Krum's hostage. Madam Maxine had selected Roger Davies for Fleur. What happened after that selection was still under investigation. It seemed the British Ministry had final say over the selections thus, it appeared, the Ministry representative changed Fleur's hostage selection and while Dumbledore was aware of the change, Madam Maxine was not. She should have been as it now involved a Beauxbatons student, but for reasons still unknown she was not informed until after the task began and she noticed Davies was not in the water.

Apparently, she was livid and an angry Madam Maxine was a scary sight to behold. Dumbledore claimed he had not been advised that she had not been informed. The Ministry representative had said it would be taken care of. Apparently, Dumbledore was not aware of the risk this task posed to Gabrielle. Madam Maxine had not objected to this task before because Fleur had sufficient training to deal with the water risks. Gabrielle did not and even if she did, she had to be conscious to do so.

Thus far, the investigation had revealed that Percy Weasley made the switch, although that had been decided at a much higher level within the British Ministry. He had a letter from the Department of International Cooperation directing him to make the switch. The problem was, while it appeared to have been signed by Bartimius Crouch, the Head of Department who supposedly had Percy doing all of the ground work for the tournament while he continued to work back in London, no one had been able to find him to confirm the letter. Added to it was there was suspicion that the letter was a forgery. Percy had voluntarily agreed to veritiserum and it was clear he knew nothing more than what he had been maintaining all along. He was told to inform Dumbledore of the switch and that the Ministry would inform the French.

It was all very suspicious and the French believed someone at the Ministry - maybe Crouch - was attempting murder. They had no proof beyond the suspicious circumstances, but given the Ministry's notorious position on Werewolves and the general British attitude that suggested Veela were considered to be of a similar nature, it looked sinister. Unlike Werewolves, the Ministry did not regulate Veela. Then again, there were no Veela in Britain.

"Now, why don't we head upstairs and talk in private?" Harry said as things began to become a little too somber for the first day.

Gabrielle nodded and took his hand.

Despite Harry's reassurances, Gabrielle was still worried he would reject her in the end. She was very scared about that prospect and nothing Harry said seemed to reassure her completely, that is until after dinner. He asked her what it would take to make the bond permanent and prove he accepted her and she told him. She was very nervous about it, but despite that she allowed him to make love to her that night. (Katie still could claim she was the "first"). Gabrielle was very relaxed and happy for the most part from then on. She still could become upset or frustrated about something and this usually showed when she started rattling on in French - although that would also happen if she was very excited about something. Harry found it endearing in a way.

One of the unwritten rules of the Clubhouse was that if the young witch had her own elf there, that elf cooked the meals - at least the ones Harry did not insist on cooking himself. Gabrielle loved his breakfast omelets, then again they all had. Dinner was usually the two couples together in the main dining room on the main floor at a table overlooking the lake. With a French and Italian witch and their elves, the dinners were French and Italian and both boys considered themselves in food heaven. (It had been similar when the Patil twins were there. They had introduced the boys to Indian food - or as they called it faux Indian as some ingredients were not in their stocks, something the Patil sisters wanted to remedy as soon as possible. Those two also were into certain East Asian cuisines including four Chinese styles and certain Japanese dishes. Again, there was an issue about ingredients, but the boys had come to appreciate all of the variety even if it seemed weird at first and even if they had to learn to eat with sticks.)

Training resumed as usual on Day 6. Their dueling training continued, although now they were actually teaching their girls as well. The Caldwell Book had become their primary source material as it seemed to cover everything and even more, although neither of them were yet ready for the final parts which looked really interesting. They had skills to master before they got that far. The girls were teaching them Healing or to be more precise magical first aid. It was part of the Beauxbatons courses of study from First through Fifth Years and those who mastered it could go on to real Healing studies after that point if they wanted to. The French believed it important. Harry and Neville soon saw why. Most of the visits to Madam Pomfrey could be avoided if students knew this. While there were certainly exceptions in Harry's past experiences, a lot of minor injuries could and should have been dealt with at the scene if only the students knew how. It was also a good review of Charms, Potions, and some Herbology and Transfiguration as well.

The girls were also teaching them their languages. It had begun practically the first day for them. Gabrielle was teaching them French and Michelle Italian. They were not expected to master either by the end of the month, just get started. Harry was surprisingly motivated (as was Neville). He really wanted to know what Gabrielle was saying when she reverted into her native tongue.

The girls were taught the Patronus Charm as had all the others. When she finally managed hers, Gabrielle's was "some kind of bird," as Harry observed. She told him that if she was right, it was a Fire Bird. It was not a Phoenix, but it was an ancient magical bird which was said to have been the form of the first Veela transformation some thousands of years ago. For some reason, the mythical bird had never been seen since then. Michelle's was a buffalo (and not the North American kind) which she promptly named Mozzarella after the Italian cheese made from buffalo milk.

By Day 24, both girls had confirmed they were pregnant and with some ceremony and a fancy dinner their contracts were now signed. While Michelle was clearly happy about this, Gabrielle was ecstatic. She was now truly bonded to Harry and he had truly accepted her. She told Harry that Fleur would probably be green with envy over this. Then again, Gabrielle thought Fleur was a bit full of herself.

Their final day was the longest to date. Each period of time compression had lasted exactly 30 days and one hour for the groups

in the Clubhouse allowing their time to correspond to real time outside when it lifted. In this case, Time Compression would lift at 7:20 in the evening both inside and outside of the South Wing. This allowed Neville and Harry to have one last private dinner with their newest "wives." Harry would later learn that the other girls had dinner in the Great Hall. This time, while the girls received their letters and roses, they would not be leaving. This time, following dinner the two couples retired to their private apartments to await the arrival of the others.

Harry led Gabrielle to her Sitting Room. Ever since Harry first saw this last apartment he felt it was very French for some reason. In their own way, each of his girls apartments seemed to him to be a reflection of who they were in some way. Harry led her to the fireplace. There, upon the mantel, was a crystal vase that had not been there before.

"As you may know," Harry said, "your rose has been magically charmed to remain fresh for several weeks. Neville's done that with all the roses. When we were doing Charms, I came across another one. If you place your rose in the vase which I have charmed, so long as what you feel for me never fades, neither shall your rose."

Gabrielle put her rose in the vase and there was a brief and faint magical glow. She turned to Harry and gave him a deep and meaningful kiss. "And ze others?" she asked. Her English had improved significantly over the past month, but she kept at least some of her accent because Harry liked it.

"They have a vase as well, although they don't know about it yet. There's a sign in the Front Entrance Salon asking them to go to their apartments first and put their roses in the vase. There's a note by the vase which tells them what I told you."

"You are a very thoughtful 'usband, 'Arry," she smiled.

The bell sounded indicating the end of the final Time Compression and Harry led Gabrielle to the main Sitting Room for House Potter.

"You look nervous," Gabriella noted.

Harry nodded. "I've missed them. Hermione especially, but I've missed all of them.

Several minutes later, he heard the bell sound again and wondered what that was about. Soon he heard several voices from down the corridor that led to each of the girls' private suites and knew they had arrived, although it was a few more minutes before the first of them entered the Sitting Room. Naturally, it was Hermione. She walked up to him, thanked him for the lovely letter, the rose and the vase and kissed him.

"I've missed you," Harry said when it broke.

Hermione nodded. "So have I, although I doubt as much 'cause it hasn't been nearly as long. You've grown."

"Oh?"

"Harry, when I left you were only slightly taller than me. Now I barely come up to your nose, if that. You're a good six inches taller. It looks good on you."

"Thanks."

"Although it could be a problem."

"Oh?"

"Harry, you were six inches shorter this morning as far as the rest of the school is concerned. It wouldn't be a problem at all, really, if we hadn't agreed to attend Fred and George's party later on. I'll have to think about this," she said as Hannah arrived.

Once Harry greeted all of the girls, they took seats. When it was just two people living here, the Sitting Room and Dining Room had seemed almost excessively spacious to Harry. They still were, but with ten people it seemed to be a more comfortable size.

"Right then," Hermione said, "here's the plan. We're back under Time Compression and will be for ten days including this evening."

"What's this about?" Harry asked.

Hermione chuckled. "That's what you get for missing staff meetings. We decided to do this during one of the last two Time Compressions."

We're going to use these days to get used to being together as a family I suppose. We all agree we need to establish some kind of routine. While we all expect you to give us all hugs and kisses every day..."

"Preferably lots," Katie added.

"... expecting you to - um - make love to us everyday is probably impractical. And it goes without saying you can't possibly sleep with all of us every night. So, each day one of us will be your Witch of the Day."

"The one who gets all the fun," Luna added.

"We change witches after breakfast and she's your primary wife for that day."

"Full boyfriend privileges," Katie said.

"She'll sit with you at meals - at least when we eat here for now, and she'll sleep with you that night."

"I guess that makes sense," Harry nodded.

"Until we come up with a better idea," Padma said.

"We agreed that Gabrielle will be your witch until tomorrow morning," Hermione said. "Then each of the rest of us in turn."

What Hermione did not explain immediately was that there was more to this than met the eye. Several minutes later, Harry was asked to go to his room and he did, wondering what was going on. Several minutes later, Gabrielle entered. She was naked which Harry didn't mind at all. She kissed him and undressed him and led him to the bed. Then, to Harry's surprise, the other eight witches entered, also naked. While he considered it a sight to behold and one he had not even imagined, he was confused. Gabrielle explained that at least for this Time Compression, when he took his witch to bed the others would be there to watch, at least until he and his witch were finished. She explained that they all had to get used to the idea of him being intimate with the others and they all agreed this would be the easiest way.

It was disconcerting at first, especially when he realized right off that he was not just going to make love to Gabrielle. They were going to have oral sex first, not that he minded that at all. But he never thought about an audience. Still, within a few moments with Gabrielle, the thought of the other witches no longer mattered. When the two of them began to make love, Harry heard some moans and they were not from Gabrielle, although she was moaning as well. He looked and saw that some ... no most ... no all of the others were playing with themselves as they watched. Okay, he thought, this is hot.

Moments after he and Gabrielle were finished he noticed Daphne and Rosie were kissing each other as were Padma and Luna. They were soon in bed with him and Gabrielle and clearly were about to have sex with each other. He looked at Hermione.

"It's either the Fertility Potion we used or the pregnancy or both," she said. "But the lot of us are incredibly randy, more so than any of us can remember. We need physical intimacy and to wait eight days to get it we'd probably go mad. Well, maybe not literally, but it would be difficult. We don't know how long we'll be this way, but until we're not... Each day you'll have your witch and we'll have ours. Each day it will be a different witch for you and a different one for us. Each night you'll sleep with your witch and we'll sleep with ours. At least for this Time Compression, each night we'll watch you with your witch and you'll watch us with ours. It's only fair, right?"

Perhaps, Harry thought watching the witches on either side of him, but it was also incredibly hot. When Katie and Hermione joined him on one side of the bed and Marcia and Hannah on the other, Harry could no longer sit there and just watch. Fortunately Gabrielle was not opposed to another round.

It was not all sex and randy witches. In fact, as it turned out that was pretty much a nighttime activity. During the day, it was less intimate all around although Harry did make sure to kiss each of his girls quite thoroughly at least a few times each day. In the mornings, Harry and his girls were in the Training Wing doing physical training or dueling. The afternoons were mostly spent relaxing together as a family on the Main Floor while House Longbottom used the training facilities. Dinner was always on the Main Floor with House Longbottom and each night save the last featured a different cuisine. The last night's dinner was arguably a feast, although the portions

were small. It began with a fancy salad. Then there was a Chinese soup. Japanese sushi followed as an appetizer. The next "main course" was French in style. It was chicken in a white sauce with asparagus. This was followed by a delicious ravioli dish in red sauce with Indian Curry as a side. Finally, there was an English bread pudding for desert, which was always Luna's favorite.

When the meal ended, Hermione stood.

"Okay," she said to all of them, "time compression lifts at seven fifty. Those of us in Gryffindor are expected at the birthday party for the Weasley twins which we all know tends to last well beyond curfew so we most likely will be stuck in Gryffindor tower for the night. I'm sure we can survive one night away from each other, although I won't say it'll be easy. Gabrielle and Michelle have to return to the Beaubatons carriage and probably will have to spend Thursday and Friday night there. It's up to the rest of you to decide where you'll spend tonight. As we all know, this is a Holiday and so long as you're not violating curfew or serving detention - and none of us are, you are not required to be in the Castle so if you're not in your dorms, no one's really the wiser. After tomorrow, after our marriages are official, we'll move in here. The only reason Gabrielle and Michelle have to wait until Saturday is to keep the staff from figuring it out until after we start Time Compression again on Saturday morning."

"What about Harry?" Ginny asked. "How do we explain his growth spurt?"

"I've been thinking about that," Hermione replied. "So long as none of the staff notice, we just tell the others he got a growth potion because he seemed to be stunted, which is true. I doubt the others know how long such a potion usually takes to work."

"That could work," Neville said. "'Bout the only Gryffs not in this room who can do a decent potion are Fred and George, and they only do decent ones for pranks."

"Tomorrow morning," Hermione continued, "as much as a pain it will be, we should all have an early breakfast in the Great Hall. We want to be back here in the South Wing by eight to go to London."

"How are we getting there?" Harry asked.



"Floo. The main fireplace in the Entrance Salon has a floo connection, or at least I hope it does."

"But that means people could floo here!"

"They have to either be keyed into our wards or have a pass from us to use it to get in or out. Remember, we are under a Fidelius Ward and there are even more wards on top of that. For example, the only elves you'll find here are ours. They are keyed in by virtue of their bonds with us. None of the other Hogwarts elves can get in."

"Same's true for the ghosts," Lucinda said. "And you may have noticed there's not a single magical painting or picture in this place - aside from the ones of us."

"Why is that?" Neville asked.

"We believe Dumbledore uses the Elves, ghosts and paintings to keep an eye on things. We don't want him finding out about this until it's too late."

"Hopefully we got the floo connection right," Hermione said. "That's the reason we should be here early just in case. If it doesn't work, we'll need to go to Hogsmeade."

"We'll floo to the Leaky Cauldron and then head to Gringotts first to deal with the marriage contracts and to review the House Potter and House Longbottom estates. Hopefully that won't take more than two or three hours."

"Then we shop until we drop!" Daphne said.

Hermione nodded. "Harry? You can take Neville to Ollivander's for his wand, can't you?"

Harry nodded. "Sure," he said.

They spent several minutes going over the general shopping plan. It now included a shop in Knockturn Alley that belonged to a reputable wandmaker. They agreed that having a second wand would be useful and Ollivander rarely sold a person two wands unless the older wand had been lost or broken and assuming that the loss was

not related to a criminal conviction. The other shop sold mainly to professional duelists, Aurors and Hit Wizards; but would also sell to anyone provided they were not Death Eaters or criminals and provided they had the money. With the end of time compression, eight of the people left. All the Hufflepuffs, Ravenclaws and Slytherins remained behind.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29th, 1995 - GRYFFINDOR COMMON ROOM.

They decided to keep things as quiet as possible. Neville and Ginny were dating and everyone in Gryffindor who was not a Fifth Year boy pretty much knew that. They had kept that secret with the help of Fred and George who agreed with their sister that Ron's behavior that year meant he was not predictable and they liked Neville. Since Ron was away at the Burrow, Neville and Ginny could act like a couple. It would be harder to explain the added complications, namely that Neville and Parvati were together as well. As for Harry and his Gryffindor girls, it was another matter. Everyone believed Harry and Hermione were a couple, even if they had not yet openly admitted it. Harry and Katie were another matter altogether. Harry decided it was best to act as if little had changed, if that was possible.

They entered the Gryffindor common room to find the party in full swing. Every Gryffindor who had stayed behind for the Holidays was there, which included Hermione's other two roommates Lavender Brown and Sally-Anne Perks. Two of Ginny's roommates were there as well as were two of Katie's including her friend Leanne. Lee Jordan was the Sixth Year Prefect and the only one present. Lee had made Prefect because of his marks and because that while he was typically a co-conspirator with the Weasley Twins, everyone thought he'd have made a great Slytherin were it not for the fact he was a Muggle Born. Of the three, he never roused any suspicion.

Katie made her way over to her other teammates Alicia Spinnet and Angelina Johnson. She figured that unlike Leanne, they would not ask too many questions about her day. Neville and Ginny headed off for a private corner, something that would go unnoticed provided the twins could see Neville's hands most of the time. Parvati had little choice but to head over to Lavender the gossip queen. She hoped Lavender had found a few new broom closets that day with whoever her current boyfriend was for if Lavender had, she's spend the bulk

of the time telling about it in vivid detail, thus avoiding any complicated questions.

Harry's added height was immediately noticed as he tried to make his way to a couch to sit down with Hermione, something that would not even earn a comment.

"Damn Harry!" Fred said looking at the now taller boy, "what have you been eating? This is a joke, right?"

Harry shrugged. "They gave me a growth potion. They felt I was stunted somehow."

"Let's hope it doesn't ruin you for Quidditch next year," Fred said. "Seekers are usually short and light."

"Given the competition, do you really think it will matter?"

"Probably not, but it can."

"Guess we'll see next year."

"Guess so."

"Hands Longbottom!" Fred called over to the corner.

"And we'd better see your's as well Gin," George added.

"You guys are no fun!" Ginny shot back, but made sure they could see hands.

"Where were you all day?" Lavender asked Parvati.

"Hermione and I and some others were in an unused classroom studying," Parvati said. It was actually a fairly true statement, excluding 1230 to 1330 when she was under Time Compression with Harry.

"Oh, you're no fun," Lavender giggled. "Danny and I were in the Library for a bit." Danny was a Fifth Year Gryffindor and Lavender's current boy toy after three months shagging Seamus Finnegan.

"You were in the Library?" Parvati asked. Lavender was rarely in the Library.

"Don't get you're knickers in a twist, it's not like we were studying."

"Oh?"

"We were looking for a new place to shag," Lavender said. "Always thought if I could find a decent shag place in there I could tell Hermione and she'd stop being such a prude about things."

One thing Parvati had learned was that Hermione was no prude at all. She had issues about doing it in broom closets or any other place where someone uninvited might intrude. Parvati had the same issues, although she never voiced them as vehemently as Hermione had. But the Hermione of the South Wing was no prude and neither was Parvati, at least not when they were in the Potter or Longbottom Apartments. She knew from Padma that Hermione had taken up nude sunbathing, among other things. It was also quite common on the floor above in House Longbottom. None of the wives in either House could be considered a "prude." However, unlike Lavender, neither could they be called promiscuous.

"Somehow, I don't think she'd be into doing it there, Lav," Parvati said.

"You're probably right," Lav said. "She'll probably wait until she's been married a year or two ... if that ever happens."

Actually, she didn't even wait to be married, Parvati thought. She was with Harry only eight days and that was mostly Harry's fault it went even that long. "So, did you find it?"

"Nah! There were a couple of promising nooks here and there, but I really couldn't see the kink factor. The Library is so not me."

"So you didn't..."

"I most certainly did! Got laid good and proper! We went up to the Fifth Year dorms and there was Sally-Anne entertaining Cormac McLaggen and Darrel Stebbins, as in both at the same time. We took the bed next to them and did it too and then switch partners. It's

a lot easier to compare guys when you're with three of them at once and that Sally-Anne is one kinky little witch!"

"Hey Parvati," Neville called out, "you said you wanted some help with Herbology?"

"Oh! Thanks Neville."

"You want to study?" Lavender asked.

"If I wanted to party all this Holiday I'd have gone home. Neville's brilliant at Herbology and I'm not." Parvati turned and left her friend wondering when the girl had become so immature and then realizing it was more her than Lavender. She flopped down next to Neville with Ginny on his other side.

"It looked like you needed an escape," Neville said.

Parvati was so tempted to kiss him. "You're the perfect Husband, Nev," she whispered. Louder she added, "Lav was about to give me a blow by blow description of her orgy this afternoon and I really didn't need that!"

"Blow by blow?" Ginny asked. "As in...?"

"Probably," Parvati said. "Oooh look! She's going towards Harry and Hermione! This should be interesting!"

"Hey Harry," Lavender said all but ignoring Hermione.

Harry looked up but said nothing.

"You've sprouted," Lavender said.

"Oh? I really hadn't noticed," Harry replied.

"Yes definitely," Lavender said, "a right proper hunk."

"Ah," Harry replied, "I see. You still believe I entered this bloody tournament on purpose?"

"Of course," Lavender said. "Everyone knows that, but you're really doing well and ... and ..."

"If you expect to take me upstairs and have your way with me, you blew it," Harry said loudly. "First off, I'm not desperate enough for the class shag. Second, I will not shag any girl who believes I ever gave a rat's fart about this bloody Tournament. Find someone else who's into that!"

"Bet you're gay!" Lavender retorted.

"I can assure you, Lavender, he most certainly is not," Alicia said. She, Katie and Angelina had all walked over. "He's most definitely into girls."

"Yeah," Angelina said. "Hard not to notice in the Locker Room."

"It's not like there's a lot of privacy in there," Katie added for Hermione's benefit. "We've seen him naked and he's seen us and he reacts to us, not the blokes, ergo not gay."

"He just doesn't want someone else's left behinds," Alicia added. "You have to admit, Brown, you're up there on the 'easy girl' list!"

"Fine! You're loss Potter!" Lavender said and headed over to her current "boyfriend."

"Doubt it," Harry said. "I'd probably catch something from her. Thanks," he said to his teammates.

"Got to have you at Seeker next year, Harry," Angelina said. "Even if you are bigger, no one flies like you! Being a 'boy-toy' is not in the Team's best interest."

"You needn't worry about that," Harry chuckled. "I wouldn't shag her with Malfoy's dick."

"Neither would Fred or George," Alicia said, "and Lavender has asked. Good boyfriends they are. You take care of him, Hermione."

"I ... I will," she said softly.

The rest of the party was a typical George and Fred production with loads of food nicked from the kitchens, pranks, music, noise, fireworks and Butterbeer and even Fire Whiskey they had managed

to smuggle in somehow. And as usual, it lasted well past midnight before Professor McGonagall had to come in and shut it down. By then, Harry and the others from the South Wing had already retired for the night given the early start they planned for the next morning. No one noticed the four girls who spent the night with their husbands' in the Fourth Year Gryffindor boys' dorm.

THURSDAY, MARCH 30th, 1995 – GRINGOTTS BANK, LONDON.

The floo worked just fine, although it took several minutes for the twenty of them to pass through the system and arrive at the Leaky Cauldron. Fortunately, a lot of school age children in the Alley during a Holiday hardly raised an eyebrow. In small groups they made their way to Gringotts and split into two groups, one was House Potter and the other House Longbottom.

Harry walked up to an open teller. He did not recognize the Goblin and waited until the Goblin noticed him.

"Yes Sir?" the Goblin asked. "You wish to make a withdrawal."

"Possibly," Harry said. "Actually, I wonder if it would be possible to speak with the manager of my accounts."

"Name?"

"Harry Potter."

"Do you have your key?"

"Um - no Sir, I don't. I don't know who has it really."

"Someone stole your key?"

"No Sir, not so far as I'm aware. I let someone use it to buy my school supplies and so far as I know she still has it."

The Goblin glowered at him. "That was unwise. Without the key, I will need a drop of your blood to verify you are who you say you are and not a thief using some damnable potion or other trick."

Harry nodded. A few moments later his identity was verified. "Do you have an appointment with your Account Manager, Mr. Potter?"

"Um - no. I guess I could come back?"

"Of course you don't," the Goblin grumbled. "You all figure we Goblins have nothing better to do..."



"That was not my intent Sir," Harry said. "If he's not free I can come back at a time when he is available."

The Goblin gave him a surprised look. "I'll see if he can find the time to see you now, Mr. Potter."

Some minutes after the Teller left, he returned but not to his window. He was on the bank floor looking up at Harry. "You're in luck," he said. "Account Manager Tarlok has a few hours to spare. Hopefully your business can be concluded by then."

"Thank you," Harry replied.

"This way," the Goblin said. Harry and his girls followed.

"They're with me," Harry explained when he received questioning looks. They soon entered a large, ornate office where there was an older Goblin behind a huge desk.

"Mr. Harry Potter, Account Manager Tarlock," the Goblin Teller said.

"Thank you," the seated Goblin said without looking up. "That will be all, Teller." As the Teller left the office and closed the door behind him. "Mr. Potter, I presume?"

"Yes Sir," Harry replied.

"As this is your first visit, I can understand if you don't know our protocol. These meetings are closed to anyone other than the account holder and his family."

"That is one of the things I'm here to discuss, Account Manager," Harry said as Hermione pulled their contracts from her book bag and handed them to Harry who handed them to the Goblin.

The goblin seemed to push a button. "Slakrik," he called, "I need nine Ministry Form 97-E's, eight Gringott Form 111's and one Form 58."

"Yes Sir!" a voice called back.

The Account Manager turned to the students. "These appear to be valid Marriage Contracts. Are you telling me you managed to impregnate all of these young women?"

"Yes Sir," Harry replied.

"I find it not worth my while to question the ways of witches and wizards, unless it comes to money," the Goblin said. "I will need verification of the blood signatures and pregnancies. A drop of blood from each of the witches will suffice for them, but I'll need nine from you Mr. Potter." A few minutes later and the blood letting was over. "It would seem these contracts are valid. I take it you would like Gringotts to process the paperwork?"

"If that's not too much of an inconvenience, Sir," Harry replied.

A goblin came in and handed the Account Manager a stack of forms and a box. "Remain Slakrik," the Account Manager said. "I'll need you to run over to the Ministry in a few moments to record some of these." He then noticed the box. "And thank you for this, I had forgotten." Slakrik nodded. The Account Manager then turned back to his guests. "I need all of you to fill out a copy of this form," he said indicating one of the three new forms. "In the blanks at the top and with a regular quill, print your full name. Ladies, that means first name, middle name (if any), maiden name in brackets and married name. Then include your age, date of birth, blood status, the name of the magical school you're attending, parents or custodial guardians, relation of your custodial guardian to you and their blood status, magical guardian and your residence outside of school. When you're done, sign the bottom with the blood quill."

"What name to we sign?" Hermione asked.

"You may use either your maiden or married name, Mrs. Potter."

"Granger, please," Hermione replied. "When we're altogether like this 'Mrs. Potter' might be confusing."

"Indeed."

As they filled out the forms, which fortunately explained all the information it required, the Account Manager began stamping the contracts with a couple of large stamps. As they finished, they

placed their forms before the Goblin and he stamped them as well. Once the last of the forms were stamped, Slakrik took all the forms and left.

"The paperwork you just filled out was your Emancipation Verification Form," the Goblin explained. "Slakrik is taking those documents to the Ministry for recording. Although as of now you are legally married and emancipated in this world, no one will recognize it until all the forms are properly filed and you receive your Marriage Certificates and Emancipation Decrees from the Ministry Records Office. Slakrik should have this all completed by the time we're through here as I assume you want to review your accounts?"

Harry nodded.

"Now, when Slakrik returns, he will bring with him two copies of the Contract, Verification, Marriage Certificate and Emancipation Decree. One set will be given to you for your records and we will retain the other for our files. We will also make the necessary copies and distribute them as required."

"Distribute?" Harry asked.

"The Ministry Records Office is supposed to do that, but we have found they are less than efficient at it considering how infrequent a situation like this is. It'll probably take a month or so for them to dust off the appropriate regulations at least once they get around to figuring out they have to. Even then, I would suspect certain Ministry Officials might be interested in having this situation - er - ignored?"

"That is why it is our policy not to trust the Ministry to do its job. Copies of the Certificate and Decree will be sent to the appropriate Ministry Office, specifically: the Department of Magical Transportation, as you can now take your Apparition Test whenever you're ready; the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, so you can avoid any problems with the underage magic laws; the Department of Economic Affairs, the Department of Revenue and St. Mungos."

"Why the last three?" Harry asked.

"Economic Affairs in case you wish to personally get your food from Distribution and if you want to start a business. Revenue because

you need to be an adult to buy or sell any business, real estate or other property valued at more than 500 Galleons as they are all exceptions from the standard Sales Tax and subject to another transfer tax. St. Mungo's because you need to be an adult to approve healing treatments for yourself or your spouse or children and for their records. Copies of those documents will also be sent to the British Muggle Government - unless any of you are from the Republic of Ireland in which case they'll be sent there as well. And before you ask, it's because this is legal in both worlds."

"So I'm an adult in the Muggle World?" Harry asked.

"Yes Mr. Potter. But where their law places a specific age restriction on a privilege, you don't get around that restriction just by virtue of being a legal adult, such as driving one of their cars, for example."

"As long as it means I'll have nothing to do with the Dursley's that's fine by me."

"In addition, copies of all four documents will be sent to each of your parents, custodial guardians, magical guardians, and Headmaster or Head Mistress. In Ms. Delacour's case, we shall also send copies to Gringotts Paris and the French Ministry of Magic. Finally, for those of you at Hogwarts, copies will also be sent to your Heads of House and school Healer."

"That's required?" Harry asked nervously.

"It is."

"When?"

"The mailings will be sent out by owl on the last business day of this week which is Sunday."

"That's fine."

"Your accounts then. Vault 687 is your Trust Vault and was funded before your parents died. Between initial principal and interest, you would have had a total of 120,200 Galleons in there had there been no withdrawals to date. As it is, your account stands at 31,995 Galleons and change."

"Why so little?"

"Let's see... Okay, you've personally withdrawn 1,758 Galleons over two summers, most of it second summer when you were living in Diagon Alley."

"That's a lot of money, Harry!" Hermione said.

"Considering Fudge never told me I had to pay for my room over the Leaky Cauldron and I found out that cheery news my last day there and how much Lockhart's bloody book collection cost, it wasn't that much! I still got about 200 in my pouch!"

"There was an authorization to Professor McGonagall in the amount of 890 Galleons for the purchase of a Nimbus 2000 in September 1991."

"I'm okay with that. But what else?"

"7,000 paid in 1981 for tuition to Hogwarts."

"Is that a lot?"

"I think my parents are paying more," Hermione said.

"10,000 to Mr. Arthur Weasley for his daughter's hand in marriage."

"I'm aware of that one," Harry nodded. "Not that it will happen."

"Mrs. Weasley accessed your vault twice. In August she withdrew 157 Galleons."

"School supplied and my dress robes, that was authorized."

"And she withdrew and additional 5,000 in March of this year."

"What the bloody hell for?"

"You were unaware of that withdrawal?"

Harry nodded.

"Do you wish us to investigate?"

Harry thought for a moment. "No. Not yet. I'll get her to explain that to me and if it is not to my satisfaction and she can't repay it, then we'll go that route."

"As you wish. Finally, drafts have been issued to one Vernon Dursley in the amount of 1,000 Muggle Pounds per month every month since November 1991. It was authorized by you magical guardian Albus Dumbledore for your care, education and maintenance."

"HA! If that man spent a hundred pounds a month on that, I'd be surprised! All this time he and my Aunt complain about money being tight. Well it wouldn't be if they had spent the money the right way instead of buying my lazy fat cousin whatever he wanted!"

"Are you saying the monies were misused?"

"That's what it looks like!"

The Goblin pushed a button. "Accounts Payable, Rirlok speaking."

"On the Potter Account, stop payment on all un-deposited drafts issued to Vernon Dursley of Little Whinging, Surry. Also, contact our Muggle Solicitors about bringing a claim of Conversion against the aforesaid Muggle for misuse of monies issued for the care of his Ward Harry James Potter of the same address."

"At once, Account Manager!"

"Mr. Potter, I recommend you close that account and transfer those funds to a new account."

Harry nodded.

"Here's the form," the Account Manager said. "Fill it out and the funds will be transferred to a new discretionary spending account. And additional amount will be transferred to it up to a total of 50,000 Galleons. Each year hereafter, the account will be refilled up to that amount. You can spend as much of that as you need or desire without penalty. If you need to spend more, there will be a three percent surcharge on additions to your account beyond the authorized 50,000 Galleons per annum."

"I have that much?"

"And more, Mr. Potter," the Goblin grinned.

More was an understatement. As they went over his holdings, everyone in the room was stunned. He owned loads of real estate, both within the magical world and the Muggle one, although most were "investment" properties. He owned several such properties in Diagon Alley, most notably in his opinion, the building which housed the Daily Prophet. He owned five personal residences, six if you included a vacation villa near Nice on the French Mediterranean coast. One was the house in Godric's Hollow, which was listed as under Ministry jurisdiction as a Historic Site, which he could change if he wanted to hire a solicitor and bring suit. One was a home in Hogsmeade which his Grandfather had loaned to Hogwarts for use for a "student with special needs" in 1971. It turned out it was the Shrieking Shack where Professor Lupin underwent his monthly transformations as a child. It was listed as abandoned and in disrepair. There was a large house in what Hermione said was a really upper class section of London and a smaller house in Devon on the coast. Finally, there was Potter Manor in East Anglia, listed as sited on 257 acres, heavily warded and having over 100 rooms.

The Potter portfolio was laden with investments in both the magical and Muggle World. To Harry, the most interesting one was a controlling interest in the Cleansweep Broom Company which was the largest flying broom maker in Britain for certain. True, they had nothing that could truly compete with his old Nimbus 2000 or his current Firebolt, but they were good brooms. To Daphne, it was his controlling interest in a publishing company; the one which printed many of their school books which caught Hermione's attention. But it also owned the Daily Prophet, which meant that indirectly Harry owned the very paper that had been slandering him and his friends all year. Obviously, that was going to change. The jaw dropping moment for everyone (except Luna, who nothing seemed to surprise) was when Harry was told that his annual income on investments and interest was over eight million galleons a year!

Potter House had five primary vaults for their gold alone and two others for other valuables. The total amount of money in the vaults as of that morning was 246,325,126.67 Galleons, not quite a billion Pounds. The Account Manager recommended that Harry authorize

discretionary spending accounts for each of his wives under the same conditions as his own. Hermione could not fathom spending the equivalent of a quarter million Pounds a year, but said nothing as she and the others filled out the remaining forms.

"Finally," the Account Manager said as Slakrik returned with the papers. He handed the papers over to Harry, who handed them to Hermione who returned them to her book bag. "Two final things," the Goblin continued.

The first was the box that had been delivered earlier. In it were ten rings. The Goblin explained they were "House" rings that would tell any who saw it they were emancipated. Every witch or wizard could receive one when they came of age and if they asked, but most never bothered. For them, however, as they clearly looked too young, the rings were important. Some shops might not cater to them without the rings to show they could shop as they pleased. The rings would only be visible to others when need be.

"Two more rings," the Goblin said. "One for Mr. Potter - or should I say Lord Potter, and the other for his wife and consort Lady Abbott. As you are the last of your Ancient and Noble Lines and are now legally adults, you are entitled to wear your Head of House Rings. Like the other rings, they are only visible to others when you desire them to be. They are to be worn on your right middle finger. Lady Abbott will wear her ring until her son - should she have one - turns twenty-five."

Harry and Hannah put their rings on. "Thank you Harry," Hannah said.

He then presented each of them with a special money bag. It magically accessed their discretionary spending accounts. They just had to reach in and pull out the Galleons, Sickles or Knuts they needed. The best part was, if the bag was lost or stolen it would not work for anyone but the original owner. Then there was a ...

"Credit card?" Hermione asked.

"Works like one," the Account Manager said. "It will access your discretionary account directly just like the bag and will only work for you. It's accepted at all the shops in Diagon Alley and Hogsmeade -



not to mention similar places world wide. There are a few places in Knockturn Alley that won't accept it, but they don't want a paper trail. The best part is, this works in the Muggle World."

"Thank goodness!" Hermione exclaimed. "A few of us are planning on shopping in Muggle London and I really didn't want to think about how many Pounds I needed and all that exchange stuff and I certainly don't want to walk around London with wads and wads of Pounds in my bag!"

"One final thing, you will need to summon the Head Potter Elf Tom at your convenience as there are Elves in the House in need of assignment. I would prefer you did not do it here. Unless there's any more questions for me, our time together is over," the Goblin said.

"Did my parents have a will?" Harry asked after Hermione nudged him.

"It is possible," the Account Manager replied. "But if there were one it was never submitted to us for execution or to the Wizengamot for Probate."

"Is that unusual?"

"Given your parents' age and the fact your Grandfather lived for a few more years, not necessarily. Given the times, one could say it was. Most people of means, even as young as your father would have had one."

"Then why isn't there one?"

The Goblin shrugged. "I do not try to fathom the minds of witches and wizards. Perhaps it was an oversight on their part? I don't know. It is also possible there was one but it's never been submitted. As there was a minor involved - being you - there should have been at least two or three copies, even four in your case. There would be one each to your Godparents as they would have been most likely designated as either your custodian - your caregiver for lack of a better word - or your magical guardian by custom. That those two copies have not appeared is unsurprising given the circumstances. Your Godfather Sirius Black was, as I'm sure you're aware, sentenced to Azkaban. He escaped and is now a fugitive. While he is not accused of any crimes against my people, he could enter this

bank freely and not fear arrest from his own. But he has to get here first. That, and to submit this Will to probate he must present it in person to Wizengamot Administration at the Ministry itself, something I doubt he could do without being arrested. Your Godmother, Alice Longbottom is legally incompetent and resides in - what's the Muggle expression? - ah yes: the magical loony bin. The others who may have had a copy were your Grandfather Charles who died a few years later. Although he was Head of House, the law did not require that he had one and perhaps if there was one he did not. The final person was the Executor who might well have been one of the afore named. If it was someone else and that person is still alive, there are serious issues here. But without the Will to prove it, this is just speculation.

"Your parents' Estate passed by laws of intestacy - as in those situations where there was no Will. By law, as an orphan, you became a Ward of the Wizengamot and specifically the Chief Warlock who had authority to oversee your upbringing, although he could appoint another to be your physical custodian. What little there was of your parents' estate passed to you just now as did the entire estate of your Grandfather who left it to his surviving heir."

"Is it possible my Godparents still have copies?"

"They were from old families and should have known the custom. If they have copies and they were responsible, it would be in their vaults. Might well be in a dustbin if they were not. That being said, at this time neither can access their vaults. And while I am your Account Manager, I cannot grant you access to the Black or Longbottom Vaults and neither will their Account Managers unless they want their heads on the block for accessory to attempted vault theft, which is what they would be doing."

"What if my Godmother's son were to become Head of House?"

The Goblin nodded. "That would work. He would have access."

Harry glanced at Hermione and nodded. He then turned to the Goblin. "Thank you, Account Manager Tarlock, you have been most generous and gracious with your time considering the lack of notice of this visit on my part."

"As odd as it seems, this has been a most enjoyable day for me. You have been most respectful which is an uncommon interaction between our races. But there is one thing I think you should all consider doing before leaving our fine establishment."

"And what's that?" Harry asked.

"An inheritance test," he replied. "Just a drop of blood and we can trace any inheritance you may have back to the opening of the first vaults here in 787. Now for Ms. Patil and Ms. Delacour, it may not matter as we only check on our Vaults, not Gringotts Paris or Mumbai. But for the rest of you..."

"Why?"

"Most of you either figure you know all there is to know about your past or figure that you have no one in this world. But you never know, do you? There are scores of vaults here from families that are believed to have died out or that have been unclaimed. It might be worth it."

"Even us Muggle Borns?" Hermione asked.

"There is always the possibility you have a witch or wizard in your family. Although unlikely, there is also the possibility you are an heir to a line long thought to have died out. Besides, it's always good to know your family history."

"What's involved?" Harry asked.

"Couple drops of blood is all," the Account Manager said.

"Which gives new meaning to a banker bleeding us dry," Harry quipped.

The Goblin actually smiled at that. "I'll have to remember that one. Maybe there's a Goblin in your line? You never know. So, unless there're any questions, I'll have my assistant take you to the inheritance office for your tests."

"I'm sure I have loads," Harry said, "just can't think of any more right now."

"Then we are done here," the Account Manager said. "I do request you try and make an appointment in the future."

"I'll do that Sir."

"May your gold never diminish!"

"And may your enemies drown in rivers of their own blood," Harry replied actually remembering something from his drop dead boring History of Magic class.

They bowed to each other but did not shake hands. You did not shake hands with a Goblin. First off, they considered it demeaning. But more critically, you did not want to deal with their claws.

Slakrik escorted them from the office and to another floor of the bank and another large office, this one with a counter and not a desk. House Longbottom was already present.

"Inheritance tests too?" Neville asked when he saw Harry.

"Yeah. My account manager recommended it. Like I need for them to draw more blood."

Neville chuckled. "It was annoying, but at least now we're legal."

"Think they'll find anything?"

"No idea. I'm pretty certain nothing new for me. Got this stuff pounded into my head by Gran. But you never know. Some of the girls might be in for a surprise or this could be

a waste of time, but I'm told it doesn't take too long. I hope

not. At least a few of my girls are itching to hit the stores."

"Queue up you lot," a Goblin called, "this won't take long! Purebloods first - save Lord Longbottom - 'alf Bloods next - save Lord Potter an' Ladies Abbott an' Bones. Rest of you lot next, then them Lords an' Ladies. Right then! Drop 'o blood each an' we begin!"

There were no major surprises for the Purebloods and no unclaimed vaults for them. Some found some interesting connections that had

been forgotten or that they were more recently Muggle than they had thought, but aside from that, nothing too shocking. They each received a copy of their personal family histories. Each of them considered it a treasure in a way, even if there was no real one behind it. It was said to be accurate all the way back to the founding of Gringotts, which meant their children would truly know where they came from over that time. The Half-Bloods had some surprises. Some of their Muggle lines actually had magical roots if you went back a few hundred years which meant they too would treasure their results. But again, there were no unclaimed vaults for them either. When each of the Muggle Borns also proved to be from distant and now defunct magical lines, whatever doubts anyone had about Blood Purity vanished. Anyone with magic, it seemed, came from magic at some point. That they were "Muggle Born" was an accident of magic fading for a time, even if that time was ten or more generations.

"Next," the Goblin called.

She had seen the drill. "Hermione Jane Granger - er - Potter now, I guess," she said knowing they wanted her name as they pricked her finger to allow the blood to fall. She watched with curiosity as it dropped onto an apparently blank piece of parchment and suddenly lines and some kind of letters began to appear branching off like a tree in all directions. She couldn't read it as they were runes and most likely Goblin runes. Slowly, however, a line leading to her glowed blue. The Goblins got all excited about this development and began jabbering away in their language and soon one of their number ran off to a door.

"What's going on?" Hermione asked knowing this had not happened before.

"Wait!" another Goblin said.

A few minutes later, they all saw their first female Goblin. She did not look as vicious as the males, but she seemed clearly old. She held a huge and seemingly ancient book and looked at the parchment that had caused all the excitement and opened the book. Hermione truly wanted to know what all was in the book, but held herself back. That would be rude.

"Congratulations, Lady Ravenclaw," the Goblin female said looking at Hermione.

"Wh-what?" she said.

"You are the direct and uninterrupted female descendant of a matriarchal inheritance. That means you are the daughter of a daughter and so forth all the way back, uninterrupted, to Rowena Ravenclaw and the only one. You are her heir in magic and in law."

"B-b-but I'm Muggle Born!"

"The inheritance is mother to daughter without regard to magic. It can only be claimed by a witch, but it must pass from female to female. It was the nature of her magic to do this. Her daughter line went magically dormant over 600 years ago and passed to you from your mother and awakened when you proved magical."

"Wh-what does this mean?" Hermione asked.

"It means you now can claim her vaults," the Goblin female said. "She has two. One has her possession - most of them at least - and the other her gold which has been sitting their growing on interest for centuries. I can't tell you what is in them without authorization to conduct an inventory which can be reported to you in two weeks. My guess is it will be quite impressive. Here's the form," she added as she passed Hermione a form. The mere fact of that action probably kept the girl from passing out altogether.

Hannah's line was of little note at least as far as she knew. There was a distant magical connection on her Muggle Born mother's side which she thought her Mum would love to learn about, but no unclaimed vaults. Susan, on the other hand, through her own Muggle Born mother's line, proved to be the legal and magical heir to the matriarchal line of Helga Hufflepuff. She too was floored by this news.

"Like Lady Ravenclaw," the female Goblin said, "the magic in your line on your mother's side died out centuries ago only to revive with you mother and yourself. "Again, as it has been centuries, the contents of the two vaults is unknown and an inventory will be required."

Susan could only nod.

"The revelation that two magical and legal heirs of the Founders came not only from a long and unbroken line of mothers and daughters but also a line that apparently lost its magic so long ago and disappeared into the Muggle world for so long should give those Pureblood Elitist bastards pause," Daphne said with a grin.

"And it also explains why their vaults remain," the female Goblin said. "Matriarchal lines lost their property rights not long after the Norman Invasion of England. If a Matriarch had vaults she had two choices. She could turn it over to her husband or son, destroying the magical succession forever or she could let it sit hoping, in time, law and society would change to allow a distant daughter to claim her birthright. Those changes did occur some centuries ago, but it was generations after these two lines disappeared into the Muggle World. Like so many others, Miss Susan's mother never took this test assuming probably there was no reason to.

"The same cannot be said for the lines of Gryffindor and Slytherin. Their monies and possessions were lost, stolen or squandered centuries ago. All that truly remains is their title and birthright for the lines remain as well."

"Tom Riddle," Harry said, "who later called himself Voldemort claims he's the heir of Slytherin."

"In life, he was," the Goblin female said. "But contrary to whatever he or you wizards believe, Tom Riddle is dead. His blood no longer flows through his veins and he failed to sire an heir. Whether a manifestation of him manages to return to this plane - as some of your kind believe - his line died forever that night in 1981. Whatever abomination returns, it will not be the Heir of Slytherin. The inheritance follows the blood, not the mind or soul."

"So there is no Heir of Slytherin anymore?" Neville asked.

"That remains to be seen," the female Goblin said. "His was the primary line. The last Slytherin by name was a daughter who married one Augustus Peverell and bore him three sons. The oldest died without issue. The second had two sons before his only wife passed away. The third had many children. Tom Riddle was descended from the oldest of the two grandsons of Augustus and

the last Slytherin. That young man's line became the Gaunts and that line led to Tom Riddle. If the second Grandson of Augustus Peverell by his second son's line remains and has a male heir, that male - assuming he is a wizard - is now the Heir of Slytherin. Otherwise, it may come from the descendants of the third son and the senior heir of that line is now standing before me."

"What?" several voices asked.

"Harry James Potter," the female Goblins said. "You are the magical and legal heir of Ignotus Peverell, not that it truly entitles you to anything unless your family retained his invisibility cloak for that would be all that is known to be left. His oldest son married into the last of the Gryffindor Line and their only daughter married into the Potter line. The Potters have known of their heritage for generations."

"So I could be the..." Harry began.

"Provided the line of Augustus's second son Cadmus has passed from this world forever."

"I speak Parseltongue," Harry gasped.

"Which merely proves you are descended from Salazar Slytherin, not necessarily his heir. That talent was not uncommon in your family, although for obvious reasons they never made that fact public. It has been known to skip a generation or two, but it shows up like a bad knot again and again."

"I'd rather not, to be honest," Harry began.

"You either are or you are not," the female Goblin said. "The test will show if that inheritance has passed from the family of Cadmus to that of Ignotus. Shall we begin?"

Harry nodded. Once a drop of his blood touched the parchment he watched as lines and runes appeared. Unlike Hermione and Susan, there was no blue line. The female Goblin then touched the parchment and one did appear leading to a name in the distant past.

"That would be the Gryffindor line," the female Goblin said. "It would seem the line of Ignotus remains a cadet line of House Slytherin as



there lives somewhere a male descendent of Cadmus's younger son. Lord Longbottom?"

Neville nervously approached. The process was repeated and a single blue line shone on the parchment.

"You, Lord Longbottom, are the direct descendant of the second son of Cadmus Peverell. With the death of the senior line in 1981, the line of Slytherin passed to your family. As you are now head of such family, you are also now the Heir of Salazar Slytherin."

Neville stood there in stunned silence.

"That ought to really mess with Malfoy's head," Tracy chuckled.

"What does this mean?"

"Neither House Gryffindor nor House Slytherin have any vaults remaining," the female Goblin said. "All they retain is the possibility of claiming their birthright."

"What birthright?"

"It's complicated," the Goblin continued. "We begin by saying the Founders owned Hogwarts at the time it was established. The four of them owned it together. We also should note that Lady Ravenclaw was the wife of Lord Gryffindor and Lady Hufflepuff the wife of Lord Slytherin. The two couples owned the Castle and lands as equals, none having a greater share or interest than the others. They knew that it would be impossible to pass their legacy on to their children. There would inevitably be dissent and strife, maybe not with that generation but in time. The school to them was far more important than property rights or inheritances. The children would receive their gold and personal property, but not the school or any rights to it.

"Thus, they placed the school in trust to be overseen by what is now the Board of Governors and managed day to day by the Headmaster and faculty. But they knew that this solution was by no means ideal. There might come a time when the school lost its way, as it were, and change would be needed but they doubted those vested in the school would seek such change, as wizards even then loathed change.

"They set it up so that if at least five generations passed since their deaths, it would be possible for the Founders Heirs to reclaim their birthright, but it would only be for a single generation meaning the children of those heirs would not have a claim just as the Founders children could have no claim. If another five generations passed, the sixth could claim again if certain conditions were met. Those conditions have never happened except, perhaps, now."

"What are those conditions?" Hermione asked.

"The Four Heirs must all be born within five years of each other which is the case here. The Lords must willingly marry one of the Ladies and the ladies willingly accept their hand in marriage. Again, that is the case here - even as between Lord Slytherin and Lady Hufflepuff as the Founders did not distinguish between Line Continuations and Plural Marriages. Finally, the four founders' heirs must consider each other friends. It need not be of the best friend nature, but friends nonetheless. Is that the case here?"

They honestly could say it was, although for Harry, Susan was a recent addition to his list of those he considered a trusted friend.

"Then the conditions are met."

"What's that mean?"

"If you claim your birthright, the four of you would own the Castle and the Grounds including what is now known as the Black Lake, the Forbidden Forest and much of Hogsmeade Valley. Under the bequest, the Board of Governors remains, but it becomes more of an administrative and advisory body. Policy would be the right of the Founders. You can remove members of that body and replace them as you see fit. As for the Headmaster and staff, you cannot remove them. But you retain final authority as to their removal and as to their replacement. Most significantly as far as the school is concerned, you have sole authority to amend or completely alter the School Charter which indirectly allows you to supervise what is taught there and the rules that apply to students. It would also give you several more votes on the Wizengamot currently held in proxy by the Chief Warlock thus giving you the political capital to advocate for change beyond Hogwarts itself."

"What about the defenses?" Harry asked.

"As Founders Heirs, you control them and probably to a greater degree than any Headmaster. No one and nothing can enter the school or its grounds or your other lands without your leave. Although from what we understand the Founders banished or banned people and creatures rather than waste their time approving all the others."

"This could be useful," Harry nodded. "How do we claim this birthright?"

"First, you must all promise that you will devote your lives and effort to improve magical education and society."

"We can do that," Neville said.

"Swear to it then."

They did and there was a faint glow in the room.

"Next, you must swear to oppose oppression in any form and the Dark Forces of any nature."

They swore to that as well.

"Finally you must promise that you will reside at Hogwarts for at least six months out of each year from this day forward."

They swore to that as well.

"Sometime after you return to Hogwarts, you can claim your birthrights. This is done by declaring yourself as the magical and legal heir of your distant ancestor Founder as shown by blood inheritance rights and stating that you claim your birthright. It needs to be done in front of at least three members of the current staff and some of the other students, at least one from each House, and at least some others from the magical public not affiliated with the school as student or staff."

"We can do that on Saturday," Hermione said and the others agree.

"You will know that you were successful when the Founders' Rings appear on your left forefingers. I believe that concludes our business," the Goblin female said. "May your enemies flee upon hearing your names!"

"May your riches be more plentiful than the stars in the night sky," Hermione replied. With that, the teens left for their day of shopping.

THURSDAY, MARCH 30th, 1995 – DIAGON ALLEY, LONDON.

Upon leaving the bank, the teens split into several groups. At least a couple of groups of girls, including all the Muggle Borns, were heading into Muggle London to shop. There were other groups fanning out throughout the Alley. Harry and Neville were left to themselves and had over two hours before they had agreed to meet at least some of the girls for lunch at a café before they were dragged off to buy new clothes. The boys only planned stop for now was Ollivanders to get Neville his wand.

The store looked just the same as it had when Harry had bought his wand over four years earlier as did the Wandmaker himself when he came to wait upon them. And Ollivander was no less creepy now as he had been then, although at least there was no more about that other wand. It did not take Neville nearly as long to have a wand match him. He knew it the moment he touched the handle of the eleven inch Holly wand with dragon heartstring core. To be certain, however, he tried to cast his Patronus and was surprised that it actually worked, although there was not a lot of room for him, Harry and the huge silvery bear in the shop. If it had impressed Ollivander, the old man was silent.

They left the shop with Neville's wand in an arm holster he had bought. They actually bought twenty of these that were said to be charmed to prevent the wand from dropping or being summoned from the holster. They still had loads of time to kill before lunch and no real plan. Harry was thinking about stopping by either Bangle & Japes Joke Shop or Quality Quidditch Supplies just to see what they had when Neville all but dragged him into another shop. Harry knew immediately it was a Jewelry store. While the store was open, there was no one around.

"What's this?" Harry asked.

"We just married nine smart and totally drop dead gorgeous witches! They're going to want rings and stuff and my guess is we do it now and surprise them..."

"We won't have to hear about it for ages and stuff. Got it. I have no idea about any of this."

"My Gran taught me a fair bit about this stuff. It's one of those rich Pureblood things, I guess. Follow my lead."

"We don't want this getting around."

"I know and I have an idea. Now let's see if we can get some service."

They walked to the main counter and looked at all the jewelry beneath the glass. Harry had no clue about any of it. Trust Neville, he thought to himself as a man walked in from the back and stood behind the counter.

"May I help you gentlemen?" the man asked.

"Yes Sir," Neville replied. "My friend here and I have rather substantial trust vaults at our immediate disposal. We also have several friends of ours and of our families who are to be married over the next several months."

"Jolly for them."

"Indeed," Neville continued. "But while we are young men of some means, our friends are not. This is supposed to be a very special time for them, don't you agree?"

The man nodded.

"We decided we can't just sit back and see their ladies left with less than the best when we can help. Isn't that right?"

"It is," Harry said.

"So, while we're not willing to go terribly over the top, we want our friends intended to remember this forever and that means they need to be able to give their girls unforgettable gifts, don't you agree?"

The man nodded. "It all comes down to the Galleons," he began.

Neville handed the man his Gringotts card. "You can check."

The man swiped the card and was stunned. No Limit appeared on the parchment. The same was true for the other young man. The jeweler gulped. "How may I be of service?"

"We have eighteen friends getting married," Neville said. "I will take care of nine and my friend the other nine. The ladies deserve a good wedding. So what I was thinking - assuming you can help us - was rings, necklaces and earrings for the lot of them. I see you have one carat diamond studs?"

The man nodded. "Quite a few, actually."

"And quite a few of the single pearl ones as well, I see. And opals as well. Right, we'll take eighteen of each."

"Right you are, Sir!" the man said.

"Place them in rows on the counter," Neville said. "Diamond, pearl and opal. We don't want them to get miss-matched. Each of the ladies orders will be different in the end."

The man complied.

"Right," Neville said, "my friend and I will look at your display for some of the necklaces we may purchase for our friends, but we also have in mind a custom job..."

Harry gave Neville a questioning look.

"One necklace for each shall feature their birth gemstone I should think. We'll pay 2,000 for them each at the maximum. The stones are by month, yes?"

The jeweler nodded.

"And you have them in stock?"

He nodded again.

"James?" Neville said looking at Harry, "you do know the birth months of the ones you're assigned."

Harry nodded. "I got two Septembers," he replied. "What's that stone?"

"Sapphire," the Jeweler said. "Deep blue."

"One of those and I should think - I've heard about them - you have Fire Opals in that price range?"

"I do."

"Fine then. One of my Septembers will be that."

"We want them all to be unique in their own way," Neville said.

"They shall be, Sir. And the others?"

"One January," Harry said.

"That would be a Garnett, a deep, red stone not as brilliant as a Ruby but quite nice," the man said.

"A February," Harry continued.

"Amethyst. It's a purple stone."

"March," Harry said.

"Aquamarine. It's pale blue."

"I think that would be a wonderful color for her. May?"

"Emerald. They're green."

Harry knew that as more than one of his girls had commented that his eyes reminded them of emeralds. "July?"

"That would be a Ruby, sir."

"October?"

"Tourmaline. It's a pink stone."

"And November," Harry concluded.



"Citrine. It's yellow. And you Sir?" the man said turning to Neville.

"A January, a February, a March, a May and June?"

"Either Pearl or Moonstone."

Neville smiled. "I think Moonstone suits her better. I have two Augusts."

"That would be the Peridot, which is a pale green as compared to the Emeralds."

Neville nodded. "I have one October as well and a December."

"December is a blue stone. I would recommend the Blue Topaz."

"That would be fine. Next up are the engagement rings. You can do those custom, yes?"

The man nodded.

"We'd like to see your two carat diamonds. I assume you have some unset?"

"Of course, Sir! Several different cuts, Sir!"

The man told them the names of the various cuts he used for what he called solitaires. They were: Round, Oval, Marquise, Pear, Princess, and Emerald. There were at least four of each on the counter. Each of the boys selected two Rounds, Ovals, Marquises, and Pears. They were to be set on either a gold or platinum ring with a matching wedding band that would have three small diamonds. Harry had the Emerald Cut set in platinum with a matching wedding band. He seemed to recall Hermione once saying she liked that cut. He hoped he remembered her correctly. Neville had the Pear Cut stone set on a gold band with matching wedding ring. They then selected one ring for themselves, explaining that most of their male friend already had their wedding rings or were getting them.

They were told that it would take about an hour and a half for the custom jewelry to be ready. After the man disappeared into the back, the boys looked over the displays and selected more necklaces for

their girls. They each selected a simple gold one, one with diamonds and one with pearls for each of their girls as well.

Almost two hours later, the jewelry were in boxes, each had a label on it with a number which told Harry who the box was meant for. The boxes were then placed in two large shopping bags per boy and the man swiped their cards effectively adding over 34,000 Galleons to the shops Vault, commenting that he and his wife might finally be able to take that trip to Italy she's been on about for ages. Neither Harry nor Neville felt that their purchases were too expensive. Harry was getting set to leave with his purchases when Neville stopped him.

"Call Dobby," Neville said.

"Why?" Harry asked.

"Two reasons. First of all you have a House Elf and it is considered normal for you to call them to relieve you of your shopping bags. Then there's the fact that if we show up at lunch with these bags, the girls are sure to ask what's in them."

"Good point."

As a very happy Dobby popped away with their shopping with instructions to place their bags in their private studies for now, the two boys decided they would give their girls their goodies the following night once this shopping madness was at an end. After a nice lunch with some of their girls, the nightmare truly began for Harry as Padma, Daphne, Rosie and Hannah spent the next several hours using him as a dress up doll, although he would admit he now had a large, decent wardrobe of his own that fit him well. He would bin his old clothes when he returned as none of them fit anymore even if they once had.

THURSDAY, MARCH 30th 1995 - SOUTH WING

They had dinner together in the Dining Room on the Main Floor. It was a test of the menu system the girls had devised with the help of the elves for their guests during the last Time Compression. The larders were now overflowing - well maybe not literally - with food stuffs as the elves had spent the day purchasing "luxury" items meaning ingredients and food items not generally available from

Food Distribution. Given that the menu would include multiple cuisines, finding and buying the additional items was considered necessary. Most Asian foods required ingredients not generally available from the Distribution Center, for example.

Just as they were finishing dessert - after agreeing that this menu thing might work - multiple "pops" were heard just outside the Dining Room. This caused Hermione and the others concern as it sounded like apparition and this place was supposed to be warded against it. Wands drawn, twenty students went in search of the source of the noise. Even before they left the Dining Room, they heard more sounds of apparition.

Much to Hermione's chagrin, Harry led the group out. He entered the wide hall that divided the Main Floor and was the first to see three groups of House Elves. One group he knew. There were fourteen of them and it was the smallest group. These were the Elves that had been with them the whole time including Dobby (wearing miss-matched socks and his lederhosen and tee shirt) and Winky. There were two other groups. One was dressed in deep blue robes and numbered fifty-nine elves total, both male and female although Harry did not have time to count. The other were in dark brown robes and numbered forty-nine. The one thing Harry could think was he doubted these were Hogwarts elves.

"Toby? Tarla? Eddie? What the bloody hell is going on?" Neville said. He obviously knew some of the new elves, at least some of the ones in the brown robes. He turned to Harry. "Toby and Tarla are my personal elves. They've been with me for as long as I can remember. Eddie is the Head Elf of House Longbottom."

"You have become Head of House, Lord Longbottom," the older Elf Eddie said. "There are staffing decisions requiring your attention."

Neville nodded in understanding. Harry looked confused as an older elf in blue robes approached him.

"I am Tom," the elf said, "Head Elf of the Potter Estates, Lord Potter. Since the death of the last Lord Potter in December 1982, we have been without direction and carried out our tasks as assigned, but there are new elves in need of assignment."

"December 1982?" Harry asked. "But my father died until the end of October 1981!"

"Your father never claimed his birthright at Gringotts. Your grandfather was the last Lord Potter and he was murdered by Death Eaters. I seek your guidance on assignments for our young ones who've come of age since that terrible day."

"Assignments?" Harry asked.

"Harry," Neville said. "While most the old families and just about all magical families of any but the most modest means have House Elves, few have more than a handful. My family has well over three hundred spread about our properties. It would seem yours has a fair few as well. If allowed or if they're enough of them, House Elves have families of their own one day. They come of age at around age ten and can be set to their apprenticeships at that time. They usually don't marry until they're in their thirties or so, but they all will in time given a mate and a chance. That means little House Elves.

"In a large family such as mine - at least as far as our House Elves side is concerned, it is the duty of the Head of House to approve the apprenticeships for each Elf once that come of age.

"Eddie?" Neville said. "As it is custom for the Lord and his Ladies to have an elf couple assigned to each for their needs and those of their children, assign eight males and four females to such capacity for my wives. Toby and Tarla shall remain as my personal elves. I think an additional eight can be assigned here for now as additional staff. Assign the remainder as you see fit, but understanding my wives are expecting and my children will need personal attendants once they are old enough."

"As you wish, Lord Longbottom," Eddie said. Twenty elves in brown stepped forward and the remainder remained behind and popped away with Eddie.

"That sounds like a plan," Harry said to Tom who nodded and twenty of the elves in blue stepped forward.

"My Lord?" Tom said. "With your permission, I'd like to assign twelve to the renovation of your cottage in nearby Hogsmeade. As I

understand, the use it was put to on loan to Dumbledore has long since come to an end and it is in need of a lot of work."

"Do as you see fit, Tom," Harry said.

The older elf nodded and the remaining elves in blue not assigned to the South Wing popped away with him. Harry kept wondering whether someone up above was laughing about how weird his life had become.

FRIDAY, MARCH 31st, 1995 - KNOCKTURN ALLEY, LONDON.

The shop did not have a name on the storefront, nor was there any indication as to what its proprietor sold. The twenty of them entered and unlike Ollivanders, where was room for them all before the counter although it was a close fit. Even now, there was almost no indication that this was a wand shop for, unlike Ollivanders, there were no rows upon rows of shelves stacked with wand boxes. There were no shelves at all. Just a couple of wands on display.

A man entered from a back room. He wore what looked like reading glasses and looked a lot younger than Mr. Ollivander and, as far as Harry could tell, a lot less creepy. But he did look grouchy.

"This isn't a tourist sight, you lot, and Knockturn Alley is not a good place for youngsters such as yourselves to be wandering about," he said.

"We were wondering if we could buy some wands," Harry began.

"I normally don't cater to school age children," the man began, "certainly not to any without their parents about."

Harry then revealed his ring. The others did so as well.

"Alright, that changes it a bit. Ollivander's not good enough for you lot?"

"We already have a wand," Harry said. "We're looking to by a second."

The man raised an eyebrow. "Explains why you're here, given that Ollie doesn't sell seconds to children, even ones with House Rings.

Then again, he can rarely find two matches in that shop of his. Don't get me wrong. I apprenticed under him for a time and his wands are pretty good, but I don't work the way he does. And that means my wands are bloody expensive compared to his. The cheapest any of you can expect is seventy Galleons and it could be a lot more and you can't negotiate the price! If the wand for you is a hundred and fifty, that's it then! So if you're looking for a bargain or deal, you're in the wrong shop."

"We don't think money will be an issue," Harry said. "But just out of curiosity, why are they so much more expensive."

"There are several reasons, but the main one is look around. Do you see any inventory? Are there any wands lying about or stacked in boxes?"

Several shook their heads.

"And you won't find any in back either, unless it's one I just finished for a customer. Ollie makes his wands well in advance. There are wands in his shop still waiting for a match that have been there since his Great-grandfather ran the place. He tells all of his first time customers that no two wands are alike, and he's right. No two wands can ever be alike! Even if he or I were to make two wands from the same branch of the same tree using sections of the same core material from the same source and making them exactly the same in every other detail, they would still be unique because we used a different part of the tree and material in each. The difference may be small, but that's all it takes.

"To increase the possibility that a random wand will match with a random witch or wizard, Ollie limits the variables. First, he only uses thirteen kinds of wood for his wands. They are the woods associated with the months of the Celtic calendar, which makes sense given that his family began making wands centuries before the Romans came. He also only uses a handful of core materials: unicorn hair, dragon heartstring, phoenix feather when he can get it, sea serpent scale and hippogriff feather.

"Now Ollie tells everyone that the wand chooses the witch or wizard - at least all the first time buyers. That is more a metaphor than truth. It implies a wand is sentient, which it is not. What each wand has is its own unique magical signature just as every witch or wizard has

their own unique signature. A wand reacts to a witch or wizard if that person's magic is more or less in tune with the magic of the wand. And I mean more or less. Children are often able to use the wands of their other family members, although this is not always the case. What you have is a matched wand or an almost matched wand, but it would be rare in the extreme that such a wand is a perfect match for their owner."

"A perfect match?" Hermione asked.

"A perfectly matched wand is perfectly in tune with its owner. Once so matched, the wand will never work for anyone else. That's why Aurors and Hit Wizards are among my usual clients. You lose your Ollivander wand in a high stakes duel and it might work for whoever picks it up. It often will work for the person who disarmed you. Not a good thing in a fight. A perfectly matched wand will never work for anyone else, ever! But, while any competent wandmaker can make a wand perfectly suited for the customer, it is extremely complicated to do so - and expensive - and time consuming. Most people are unwilling to wait two to three weeks to get a wand."

"We don't mind about the cost or the time," Harry said. "It's not like we need them today."

The man nodded. "To make a perfect wand for you, I can't restrict myself to a handful of wand woods and core materials. I had over a hundred and fifty different woods from around the world and over two hundred different core materials. Likewise, the materials are not restricted to magical creatures. Magical plants work as well. Finally, most of my wands have at least three core materials, some have more depending upon what best matches the customer's magical signature."

"How can you do that?" Hermione asked.

"I could say because I'm a genius or part seer or the best there is in this trade. I'd like to think I am the latter of those, but it's actually fairly straight forward.

"First off," he waived a wand and the countertop changed. It now looked like a display rack with well over one hundred foot long sticks of wood in all sorts of colors from almost pure white to black with browns, yellows, reds and even some greens, orange and a purple

as well. He then placed a bowl of red liquid at one end of the display case. "What I will ask you to do is dip your finger in this potion here," he said indicating the bowl. "It's harmless, unless you're fool enough to drink it. What it will do is allow your magic to interact with the wood. You will then touch each and every stick in this case. What we are looking for is a golden glow, and we check each stick in case there's more than one reaction. We're looking for the strongest one. That one will be your wand wood. Queue up!"

Harry went first. It was a while, it seemed, before there was any reaction at all. The first he got was from Holly, the same wood in his wand. He knew what it was because each stick had a label.

"Is that your current wand wood?" the man asked.

Harry nodded.

"Right. Keep going."

A few moments later, he got a much stronger reaction one which would prove to be the strongest. The label read "American Cherry." When Harry touched the last piece of wood (walnut) there was no reaction and the wand maker made a note on a pad. There was a bowl of clear liquid at the end which Harry was told to place his finger in to neutralize the potion.

One by one the others did the same thing. It took about an hour for all of them. In the end, only Hermione was getting a new wand from her same wand wood (Vine). She was also the only one with any wood native to the British Isles. No two of them had the same wood, not even the Patil twins, although they both reacted strongest to a couple of woods native to India. The group had woods from all over the world which surprised them all, although the Wandmaker said it was not that unusual.

Next, they repeated the process with a green potion and magical plant materials for their cores. There were about two hundred different samples. Harry got a very strong reaction from two of them. He would never be able to remember their names, only where they came from. One came from the Amazon Jungle in Brazil and the other from a place called Borneo. A few of them had no reactions at all, but were told that was not unusual and not to worry about it. Aside from Harry, Neville was the only one who had a reaction to



more than one type of plant material - in his case three. Harry remembered one was European Magical Hemlock and that another was from the Congo and the third from China.

Finally, there were the magical creature materials. This time the potion was blue. Harry reacted to phoenix feather, but it was not as strong as Ashwinder Scale and something called Kurabaca Hair. Those two would be used in his wand. He recalled the Ashwinder was primarily found in North Africa. The other creature was native to South America, apparently. "A very global wand indeed," the wandmaker commented.

Aside from Neville, everyone had at least two materials from this tray. Neville only had Chinese Fireball scale. But he was tied with Harry with four components and the others had only two or three.

The last person through the line was Gabrielle. At one point, after getting two strong reactions (she had not had any luck with the plants) she absently ran her finger through her hair. She did not see what happened, but most others did. There was a strong, golden glow.

"You wouldn't be Veela, by chance?" the wandmaker asked.

Gabrielle nodded.

"That explains it then. Under certain circumstances, Veela hair would produce such a reaction. Your current wand?"

"Veela hair from my grandmother, just like my sister."

The man nodded. "Ollie thinks it's a temperamental material. It can be. It always is if the hair is taken without the consent of the Veela and it can be if the wand is given to someone who is not somehow connected to the donor. But if your grandmother gave the hair specifically for your wand, it is quite a powerful core material. The best match for a Veela is her own hair, assuming her magic has that affinity to begin with, which is by no means certain. The next best would be from her mother or grandmother, assuming they love their child. It can also work for another ... a person for whom the donating Veela has very strong feelings for. Do you have strong feelings for some in this room?"

Gabrielle nodded.

"If they get a strong reaction from your hair, would you be willing to donate them a strand?"

Gabrielle nodded again. Everyone tried her hair. In the end, eleven strands were removed as the root was needed for the wand core. In addition to her own wand, Gabrielle's hair could become part of Harry's wand, each of Harry's other wives, and Gabrielle's best friend Michelle.

The man finished making notes on his pad. "Okay then, if you want your wand from me, here's the damage..."

They were very expensive. Gabrielle's was the least so at only ninety-one Galleons. Harry's was a whopping a hundred sixty-seven, with Neville next at about twenty Galleons less and everyone else somewhere in between. They were told the wands would be ready for pick up in four weeks and that their elves would be acceptable, unless they wanted the wands as they were finished. The group agreed to send a couple of elves (one from each House) in four weeks time.

THE SOUTH WING around noon.

The floo flashed green and a tall, thin man with long black hair stepped out and looked around. He had assumed his invitation was to one of the Potter properties, but looking at this large room with fancy furnishings and paintings he did not recognize as magical, much less as anything he had seen before, he was not so certain. He heard the floo flare again and another man stepped out. He too was tall and thin, but while the first man appeared somewhat under nourished, the second sandy haired man was probably naturally thin. The second man carried a suitcase. He too looked around in confusion.

"What is this place, Moony?" Sirius Black asked.

"Never been here before either?" Remus Lupin asked back.

"Can't say that I have. Judging by the paintings, I wonder if this place is even magical."

"Judging by that Elf over there, I think you'd be mistaken," Lupin said pointing at an elf behind a short counter in one of the corners near some stairs and what looked like a lift. The two walked over.

"Ah!" the Elf said looking up. "You are the first to arrive. I am Emile, personal Elf to Mademoiselle Gabrielle Delacour and am acting as Chief Concierge. Welcome to the South Wing. Front!"

"France, you think?" Sirius said noting the slight accent.

Remus merely shrugged as another Elf came over, this one wearing a pair of mismatched socks, lederhosen and a Def Leppard T-Shirt.

"Dobby?" the first elf said, "these are Mr. Sirius Black and Mr. Remus Lupin. Mr. Black is assigned Room 501 and Mr. Lupin Room 502. Escort them to their room please."

"Right away, Concierge Emile!" the Elf said. "This way Professor Lupin and the Great Harry Potter's Godfather!"

They followed the strange elf to the lift and entered. They could tell immediately they were on whatever floor "2" was and saw the elf press a button at elf level - there were additional buttons for people of their height. It was for "5". The doors soon opened and they were soon walking down a long corridor. The first two doors they passed on either side of the corridor had the numbers 522 and 521 and the numbers descended from there. Finally they reached what appeared to be the last two doors - 501 and 502. Beyond they could see a huge room of some sort.

"These being your rooms," the elf said. "501 being the Great Harry Potter's Godfather's and 502 being Professor Lupin's. These being your keys, Sir," he added handing them each a key, "although once you being keyed, you can use your wands to open."

"I don't have a wand," Sirius muttered.

"The Great Harry Potter needs telling, Sir! Dobby be sure the Great Harry Potter be finding a way to get his Godfather a wand. Can't be having a wizard without his wand, Sir!"

"Who are you?" Sirius asked.

"Dobby, Sir. The Great Harry Potter saves Dobby from mean family and Dobby bonds to the Great Harry Potter! But the Great Harry Potter being no Master to Dobby. The Great Harry Potter being Dobby's friend! Dobby being the Great Harry Potter's personal elf, Sir!"

"And your acting as our Valet or what do you call it?" Remus asked.

"There being many guests arriving today and tomorrow, Sir," Dobby said. "We all be acting as such at one point or another. Your rooms Sirs!"

Remus turned to his room and Sirius to his and they unlocked and opened the door. The room was huge! There was a large bed along one wall with night stands on either side. There was also a desk, dresser and chairs around a table and even a couch, plus a decent fireplace with windows on either side. On one wall there were two additional doors, but before Sirius could explore them there was a snap and he found himself stuck in a chair looking at a female elf in a dress.

"My mistress said you'd be a raggamuffin," the elf said. "She was truly being kind. Your clothes are rags! Fortunately we can deal with that. Your hair...when was the last time you shaved?"

Sirius was too surprised to answer.

"And you stink of sweat and ... hippogriff?" The elf wrinkled her nose. "Right then! Shave!" she snapped her fingers. "Hair cut!" she snapped them again. "Now don't force me to make you shower or brush your teeth! Don't worry about those rags of yours, you'll never see them again. While you shower, I'll lay out some decent things for you. That door!" she pointed.

Sirius knew better than to argue with an elf that was not bound to him. Besides, a shower and all that sounded nice.

Sirius had no idea how long he enjoyed his first shower in years, but he did enjoy it. It was only after he saw himself in a mirror for the first time. He was much thinner than he remembered but what caught his attention... That elf butchered my hair! He thought. He never remembered it being this short. Then again, no one else

would either, would they? A disguise without a disguise, he thought. Someone was bloody brilliant! He walked back into the main room - bedroom - of his with a towel around his waste almost humming and with almost a smile and saw that there were clothes laid out for him on the bed and a pair of shoes as well. He had been barefoot for well over a decade now. Luxury upon luxury - thank you Harry, he thought as he dressed.

He only noticed the picture or painting over his bed after he dressed. It made no sense to him at all. It was clearly not magical. Even a wizard lacked that insane imagination!

"You be dressed!" a voice said and he saw the female House Elf again. "You be looking dashing, Winky thinks!"

"Winky?"

"I be sorry," she said almost moping. "You be so dirty and such I not be introducing myself properly. I be Winky. I be personal Elf and handmaiden to my Hermione."

"Hermione?" Sirius asked. "Hermione Granger? I thought she was a Muggle Born."

"She be that," Winky said proudly. "But she saves Winky's life by accepting Winky's bond and she now be Winky's friend."

"You butchered my hair!" Sirius said not wanting to get into the details of these elves. Something had happened and he doubted he could get it from them.

"Winky be agreeing with her Mistress. You be dashing with new clothes and hair. Besides..." the elf snapped her fingers. "Now only those who believe Sirius Black is innocent can sees him. Others will see someone else - at least until they believes."

"What's that?" Sirius asked pointing to the painting above his bed.

"Mistress Hermione be thinking the Dog Man might find it funny. It's a muggle painting - although it not being considered a true work of art."

"It's a bunch of dogs playing cards!" Sirius said.

"My Mistress thinks you will see the irony in that," the elf said.

Sirius looked at the tacky picture and thought about the statement and then chuckled and soon laughed beyond the point where it hurt. "She's quite right," he finally said.

"Mr. Lupin be on the balcony," the elf said. "Out your door to the right, through the guest lounge and out the door."

"Thank you, I guess," Sirius said.

He followed the elf's simple directions and soon stepped out on the balcony of the floor. Remus was there looking out at the scenery.

"Moony?" he asked.

"Take a look, Padfoot," the man said. "I swear this is part of Hogwarts!"

Sirius looked out and saw the lake. It was truly familiar and then off to a side...

"Hogsmeade?" he said.

"Either that or some replica," Remus replied.

"This can't be safe!"

"It can," a squeaky voice sounded. They turned and saw the elf called Dobby. "This once being the South Wing of Hogwarts. It now being home to House Potter and House Longbottom. It be having very powerful wards to keep out any but the invited. There's being a rune based Fidelius. All the wards are rune based. There's being notice-me-not and similar at the only entrance from the school and repelling wards as well. There's being wards against polyjuice potions, invisibility, animagus - those actually being malicious intent repelling wards - apparition, portkeys, the Floo, dementors - actually most magical creatures unless they be bonded to the Houses - to name but a few of them. The wards even be working against House Elves save those already bound to the two Houses. Unless you be living here or invited, this place no longer exists. And the wards being placed inside the walls, not outside."

"That's brilliant!" Remus said.

"Oh?" Sirius asked.

"Most property wards use boundary stones with warding runes to define the warded area. Their weakness is a ward breaker can find them and with effort get through the ward to get to the stones. Deactivate a boundary stone and the ward collapses, at least in that area. But there is no property line here, is there? We jut out over the lake. By placing the runes inside, a ward breaker would have to get through the full force of the wards to even begin to take them down and, my guess is he'd have to deactivate all the runes. Good luck finding them. The only way to force your way in would probably require you to destroy most of the wing. Given that you can't even find the wing, good luck. Add to it that Hogwarts sits atop a major magical node and the wards are very powerful to begin with. But why would Dumbledore do this?"

"Dumbledore not be doing this," Dobby said. "Dumbledore not be knowing. Miss Grangy be doing this."

"I don't understand," Remus said, "surely Dumbledore had something to do..."

The elf shook his head. "Dumbledore be knowing the Great Harry Potter is allowed to trains. Professor McGonagall be giving Miss Grangy permission to use unused part of Hoggywart for training. Miss Grangy be knowing South Wing not being used and be using it for training."

"But this clearly had to be used," Sirius said. "When we were here it was abandoned and a dump! What we've seen suggests a total renovation! There's no way Hermione could have done that!"

"It tooks time," Dobby admitted. "Eighteen students and fourteen elves be working on this. Over one hundred twenty thousand hours of labor to makes what you sees now."

"But how? That's like ... they skipped classes?"

"No Great Harry Potter's Godfather. They being good students and not being missing their studies! Dobby not being allowed to say how."

The Great Harry Potter be telling you later. But he be only finding out two days ago. The Wing being Miss Grangy's surprise."

"This is bloody brilliant," Sirius began. "But ... Dobby you do know my status."

Dobby nodded. "The Great Harry Potter's Godfather being falsely accused fugitive with wizards hunting him. No one enters this Wing without the Great Harry Potter's or Lord Longbottom's permission and ... no one leaves without either. You be under the protection of two Ancient and Noble Houses - four actually."

"Four?"

"The Great Harry Potter will explains when shopping is done. The Great Harry Potter being in Diagon Alley for now. Bell will ring when Great Harry Potter being home.

"Now, you being allowed to wander the wing - mostly. Top floor being greenhouses, and there being dangerous magical plants there so if yous be going there, be careful. Sixth Floor be like this one, this being Fifth Floor. Fourth Floor being House Longbottom and being inaccessible without invitation from a member of the House. Third Floor being House Potter - same restriction. But yous being invited and will dine with House Potter. Yous may go there when the Great Harry Potter returns. Second Flood being where yous came in and has many public rooms. Main Dining Room being there. Breakfast being from six to nine, Lunch from eleven to one and Diner from six to nine, unless yous be tolds different. Snacks being available from nine in the morning 'til midnight in the recreation room which, yous being adults, also be serving adults beverages after three in the afternoon until one in the morning. There also being a music room and recreational library for yours enjoyment. First Floor being training. South side be having the Dueling Room, Lockers, Gym and Swimming Pool. North side - Hogswarts side, be having magic library, class rooms, potions labs and infirmary - although we's hopes you not be needing that's. Basement being storage, kitchens and Elf Quarters and being off limits. You be needing a snack and not be feeling likes the Dining Room or Recreation Room, we elves being happy to serve. Enjoy your stay," the elf concluded as he popped away.



"House protections, Padfoot!" Remus said. "If that's true, not even the Minister and all his men can touch you here!"

Sirius nodded. Then he chuckled. Then he laughed. "I've said Hermione was the brightest which of her age. It seems I've underestimated her!"

"Padfoot?"

"Don't you see, Moony? Don't you see a prank of gargantuan proportions right before your eyes? She's made us Marauders look like rank amateurs! She stole a whole wing of this school right from under the eyes of Dumbledore and everyone and made it so that they might not even know it's gone! Bloody brilliant doesn't even begin to describe this!"

## DIAGON ALLEY

For Harry and Neville, their shopping marathon was over after an hour in the toy store buying all sorts of baby toys claiming they were gifts for a friend who had just had twins - a boy and a girl - as they both bought boy and girl toys along with loads of plush animals. Again, Dobby relieved them of their parcels and they walked back to the Leaky Cauldron to floo back to the Wing. Harry felt very relieved to make it back to the South Wing without running into anyone he knew from school aside from his shopping party.

FRIDAY, MARCH 31st, 1995 - THE BURROW.

The Weasley family was the largest family in magical Britain or at least the largest family that still had children in school. It had been an Ancient and Noble line long ago but had lost its status after a series of rather disastrous business dealings and political disputes. That being said, it had remained a respected family at least in certain circles. It was now headed by Arthur Weasley who had been born the third of four boys, the sons of Septimius Weasley and Cedrella Black in 1950.

Arthur met his future wife Molly Prewett when he started Hogwarts with her in Gryffindor House in 1961. Molly had two older brothers, Fabian and Gideon. Like the Weasleys, the Prewetts were also a very old line. They were also somewhat wealthy, where as the Weasleys had been farther down the economic ladder.

House Weasley owned over three hundred acres of land in Devon near the town of Otter St. Catchpole. There had once been a manor house on the estate, but it burned down some 200 years before Arthur was born and never rebuilt, mainly because the family no longer had the wherewithal to do so. But as Arthur was the third son, the land would go to his older brother, so he would have to find his own way in life. In the summer after their Fifth Year, Arthur asked Molly's father for permission to marry. After all, while he may not have an inheritance, he was a Prefect and at the top of his class having posted ten Outstanding O.W.L.s. His request was denied and the Prewett's were trying to arrange a match with a wealthier family.

Arthur went on to become Head Boy in his final year, a position that had almost always led to a promising career within the Ministry of Magic. In the last one hundred years, only two Head Boys did not take that path. One was Albus Dumbledore, whose works since school were well documented. The other was Tom Riddle who went to work in a shop of all places and then disappeared a couple of years later after a scandal arose where he was suspected of theft and murder. He was never heard from again.

Molly could care less about Arthur's finances at the time. The fact that he was Head Boy and therefore destined for success was enough for her peace of mind. It did not hurt that she was in love with him. During the Spring Holiday in 1968, the two eloped much to the disappointment of Molly's parents, although her brothers were

very supportive. After finishing Hogwarts, Arthur did begin working for the Ministry in the Muggle Affairs Department which was affiliated with the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. It was not considered a position for the politically ambitious, but it was a good job.

Arthur and Molly had their first son Bill in 1971. At the time they were living in a flat in London. Charlie followed in 1973. Percy was born in 1976 and Fred and George in 1978, all while living in the now magically expanded London flat. In 1979, Septimius Weasley passed away suddenly. Unlike many who died early in those years, he was not a victim of the war. But his two older sons had been. Cedrella had already passed as well, so Arthur became the Head of House Weasley and inherited the estate in Devon. Their youngest two children were born after the move.

The advantage to the estate was they no longer paid rent. But even without that expense, they now had seven children to send to Hogwarts. They knew they could not afford to do that on Arthur's salary. Arthur decided to rent out much of the estate to some Muggles who would farm it. He retained forty acres for his family in a mostly wooded section. It had a nice apple orchard, and a large meadow in the woods which the boys would use to play Quidditch. On a cleared section of about five acres, Arthur spent the summer of 1979 building their home which he named the Burrow as it was built over one.

The building was a wooden tower that looked as if it were built by someone who never heard of a plump line, level or square. It also looked like it was made from scrap wood, at least until it was painted (because, for the most part, it had been.) It had five floors. The Kitchen, eating area and living room was on the first floor. The bedrooms were on the upper floors. The only part of the house that was done by professionals were the fireplaces and chimneys and it was around this column of brick and mortar that the rest of the house rose. As odd as it might look to a Muggle, or even most magicals, the Burrow was a fairly comfortable home for the family of nine.

Hogwarts was an issue for the Weasleys, even in 1979 when there were only five children, none of whom were in school yet. The law required all Muggle Born witches and wizards be allowed to attend the school and most did. Some families chose not to and those

children remained in the Muggle World. Since attendance was practically mandatory for magicals, the school provided tuition assistance for Muggle Born families who lacked the income and resources to pay. The same was not true for magical families, or at least not to the same extent. There were tuition credits based upon income level, but it was not based upon the number of children. Arthur's salary, while modest, was enough that if they saved they could send three of the boys through school without such assistance. If they really cut corners, they could probably afford to send a fourth through, but not all five. Molly figured somehow they would manage in the end. After all, they had been saving for all the children since Arthur had started working and it was still three years before they had to send any of them. Molly's attitude did not change even when she found out she was expecting again, which was not long after they moved into the Burrow.

Ron was born in March of 1980 and for the next two and a half years or so, Molly would have her hands full with six young boys running about as the oldest was not due to head off to Hogwarts until September of 1982. Ginny was the surprise that put a damper in Molly's hopes that they could manage. She would never say that Ginny was unwanted or a total accident, but she was a surprise. The first surprise was that Molly became pregnant while on the contraceptive potion. She always bought several doses of them because it was cheaper than buying one at a time. The Healer said it was probably from a bad batch and therefore did not work and the old batch wore off. The second surprise was that Ginny was a girl. That changed everything. Hand-me-downs were no longer a realistic option. Sure, maybe some play clothes. But Ginny would need skirts and dresses and girls toys and other things she could not expect to be passed down from her brothers. Even buying on discount, Ginny would be the most expensive child in the family and at the wrong end of the line. Molly seriously worried how they would pay for her education. Ron was already problematic. Molly was not about to home school her children unless there was no option. Home schooled boys rarely amounted to much. So many jobs required a formal education and O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s. To get top scores, you needed top teachers and few parents could manage that in all subjects.

In a way, fate smiled upon Molly in late 1981. Near the end of October, her brother Fabian was killed. As tragic as that was, given that Gideon and her parents were already dead and only Molly had

produced children, she inherited the Prewett estate. This included the house she grew up in and a vault. She sold the house and many of the possessions. It was not a lot, but it was enough to pre-pay the tuition for all of her children. There were other things she would have liked to spend the money on. There was only one bathroom in the Burrow, for example, and despite Arthur's suggestion that he could always build an outhouse - that was not going to happen!

A month later, Albus Dumbledore showed up. He was now acting as Magical Guardian for Harry Potter - the Boy Who Lived. As such, he was offering them a marriage contract for Ginny. The terms included free tuition for Ginny through Fifth Year and ten thousand Galleons. The catch was the contract was practically unbreakable and Ginny would never sit for her N.E.W.T.s as she was expected to be married and having children by then. But Harry was the last of a very wealthy family and they needed the money going forward. Arthur was reluctant and clearly did not like the idea. Molly forced the issue. The contract provided for Ginny. They still had six boys who needed a top notch education if they ever wanted a decent job. The couple signed. Six months later, the Burrow had five new bathrooms (Ginny and her parents had small, private ones), a new kitchen and a work shed for Arthur as Molly wanted his collection of Muggle things out of the house as they cluttered up the place.

Bill Weasley began Hogwarts in 1982 and for Molly it began her dread of the place. Every year since, she had been called to the school because one of her children was in some kind of trouble. Bill began his Hogwarts career by breaking the nose of a classmate at the Sorting Ceremony. The other boy had just been sorted into Slytherin and was the son of a Death Eater in Azkaban for killing one of Bill's uncles. Bill did well in school and managed eleven O.W.L.s, one short of the maximum and the one he did not get was in a subject he never took. He would eventually become a Prefect and Head Boy, but his first three years gave rise to the famous Molly Weasley howlers. Of her other six children, the only one who never had her called to Hogwarts to deal with the child was Percy.

When Bill was named Head Boy, Molly dreamed of the day he entered the Ministry. But that did not happen. He never applied there. He told her that he did not want a boring job and, with the wizarding world at peace, there were no really exciting jobs really. He became a Curse Breaker for Gringotts and deep down Molly blamed him for Charlie later heading off to Romania to chase dragons. As far as

Molly was concerned, it did not help matters that Bill chose to wear his hair long and in a ponytail and sport a dragon tooth earring.

The truth was that Bill was making more money as a Curse Breaker than any of the people he knew his age at the Ministry. His Gringotts salary once he finished his Apprenticeship was higher than many Ministry employees his age and he got a cut of the take for a successful treasure hunt. He had recently returned from a particularly successful one in Central America that had netted him a cool seventy-five thousand. He really could care less about his hair or earring. He had been home only a couple of days when Ginny had invited him to spend the weekend at Hogwarts and he had immediately accepted. Even though she had only been a year old when he headed off to school, he liked his little sister.

"Afternoon, Mum," he said as he sat down at the kitchen table.

"I thought you were out with the other boys playing Quidditch," she said.

"I was. Done with that. Ron's not happy, but I do need to get up to Hogwarts to visit the others since I have the time for now."

Molly smiled. "Care for a bite?"

"Love one," he said as his mother passed him a sandwich.

"You need a haircut and get that thing out of your ear!" she said.

"You always say that and you know where this is going," Bill replied unconcerned. "I don't need to look 'respectable' in my line of work and the birds think I'm dashing. Dad back yet?"

"No." Molly could never understand why Bill went for that job. She still could not. Working with Goblins! What kind of job was that for a Head Boy? "Are you sure you can afford to take all this time off from work? Everyone knows Goblins don't take holidays."

"And they knew we need them from time to time," Bill said.

"Are you sure you can afford it?"

Bill chuckled. "Of course I can! I'm not working for the Ministry! I make a good living what I'm doing."

"Percy just got a raise, you know," Molly said. "He's now making 6,000 a year and..."

"Don't play this game, Mother! I am not working for that organization so forget it. Besides, I would have to take a massive pay cut to do so!"

"Oh? What's a few thousand Galleons compared to a respectable job?"

"Mother, my annual salary is currently 22,000! You know of a job at the Ministry that pays that well to an honest person my age? At that does not include my bonuses! I've averaged double that per year since I received my full certification! If I leave field work, it'd be to work in the bank proper. That would mean a pay cut for me, but it would still be more than Percy can hope to make anytime soon! So forget about my ever working there! The only other job I might consider would be a teaching position at Hogwarts and being a clerk at the Ministry would not help me at all! I need the certs and experience and most Ministry jobs don't lead to that!"

Molly decided not to pursue the issue. The young man was single and earning more than his own father had ever made a year. She still did not consider his job the least bit respectable. Even with his money, she doubted he'd ever meet a respectable young witch to marry because few would associate with Gringotts employees. That and there was the fact he was gone to remote and inhospitable places eleven months of the year. "So you're heading up to Hogwarts today then?" she asked changing the subject.

"Yes mother. As soon as Dad gets here."

"Did you ask your brother Ron to go with you?"

"He and his friends have no intention of heading up there anytime before Sunday. He made that clear Wednesday when they arrived and again this morning."

Molly snorted. "He could be using this time to study! Goodness knows with his marks he needs it!"

"It's been a stressful school for him, Mum," Bill said. "Only Ginny's had it rougher arguably. Ron's nearly snuffed it a couple of times at least as has Ginny. None of the rest of us had it that way."

"Yet Ginny's at the top of her class," Molly began.

Bill shrugged. "I'd say leave it be. I'm not saying don't get on his case, but for this Holiday let him relax. Despite what he says, he still is having issues with Harry being in the Tournament. The only good thing is he no longer wants that chance at eternal glory. Besides, they've closed the Quidditch Pitch at school 'ccording to Ron. That was one of his outlets and it's not there this year."

Molly shrugged. "So when are you leaving?"

"Soon as Dad's ready."

Molly smiled. "He is looking forward to it isn't he?"

Bill nodded. "I think so."

## SOUTH WING

In many ways, learning their daughter was a witch had been frustrating for the Grangers. It was not that they did not or would not believe it was true. They had witnessed what they now knew were outbursts of accidental magic when she was younger and, if that left any doubt, there was the demonstration by Professor McGonagall when she visited to inform them of her daughter's talent and Hogwarts school. Her daughter had let them read her school books after she was done with them or when she was not using them as at least a couple of them were general reference books she would need with her at school her whole time there. The summer before her Second Year, they had purchased extra copies of many of her books when they took her to Diagon Alley for her school supplies.

The frustrating thing was aside from the books and what Hermione would tell them in letters or during her times at home, they were not really allowed to be a part of this new life. It was like learning their daughter was a musical prodigy and was attending one of most elite musical schools in the world and they were never allowed to hear her practice or attend her recitals or concerts. They knew she was



doing well in school from the glowing letters they had received from Professor McGonagall who in addition to teaching her Transfiguration was also her Head of House. But they were not allowed to truly see this for themselves because of certain laws prohibiting her from using magic at home and magics that prevented them from visiting the school - and they had asked.

Then, about a week or so ago, they received a letter from their daughter inviting them up to Hogwarts for this weekend. The letter explained that the magic that would otherwise keep them away did not work if it was possible to get them through the wards around the school safely and they had a way to do that. They would stay in a nice facility not unlike a hotel near the school and would be able to see magic, meet at least some of her professors as well as many of her friends and their families. She made it sound not unlike an Open House or some such. The letter told them that they would be picked up at 2:00 in the afternoon of Friday, March 31st, and brought to the school and would stay there until Sunday evening. Although they had to rearrange some appointments, naturally they were not going to miss this chance, especially since their daughter had remained at the school over the Christmas Holidays.

The couple packed a bag with the clothes they would need for the weekend and a couple of books for later in the evenings. Right around one they heard a "pop" and a strange being stood before them. It was about the size of a six year old child with bat like ears, a slightly grayish green complexion and extremely large eyes for its face. It wore a blue dress that somehow looked flattering on it and had long, brownish hair that spilled down its back.

"I am Winky," the Elf said. It would only be later that the Grangers learned that Winky had not always spoken the Queen's English. "I am a House Elf. I am Miss Hermione's friend and Elf and am here to take you to the South Wing, which is where you'll be staying while you are with us. I see you have your bags. I'll just pop those to your room and then we can go." The Elf snapped its fingers and the bags disappeared. They would later find out that most of the rest of their clothes did as well.

The Elf then spent the better part of an hour explaining to the Grangers what a House Elf was and their relationship with Witches and Wizards, including how breaking the bond could be fatal to them and was the cruelest thing anyone could do to an Elf. In her

explanation, she told them how she came to be Hermione's Elf and that Hermione was vehemently opposed to Elf cruelty, but understood the magic and took Winky in when most witches and wizards would not have. The Grangers were horrified at how cruel some magical families could be.

"But are not Muggles capable of cruelty as well?" Winky replied. "Do you not have laws about abusing family members? Children? Pets and even wild animals?"

The Grangers nodded.

"Magic does not make a person cruel or good. They are that of their own accord and probably would be had they never known about magic," the Elf said. "Hermione is a very good person. Were all witches and wizards like her, they would never have had to fear or hide from Muggles. It was the bad ones who abused their gifts at the expense of others who led to that. She's my best friend and I willingly serve her and her family because I am also her friend. Now each of you take my hand and we can go."

One moment they were standing in their living room near Oxford and the next they were standing in what looked like a very, very fancy home or hotel lobby. They had not felt a thing.

"Where are we?" Robert Granger asked as he looked around the vast room.

"We call this the Main Floor," Winky said. "This room we call the Entrance Salon. It is the entrance to the South Wing of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and is the only entrance to this wing by any means. This is the Second Floor of the Wing and we call it the Main Floor in part because it is the only connection to the rest of the Castle, but also because most of the common use rooms are on this floor. Follow me please."

She led them to a small counter behind which was another Elf who introduced himself as Emile. The couple then heard a growing number of voices behind them and turned and saw a group of people coming towards them from a fireplace. There was a green flash of flames and another person stepped out. Most had suitcases or the like.

"You must be Robert and Rose Granger of Oxfordshire," Emile observed. "Parents of Hermione Granger."

"We are," Robert said.

"Just in time I see. A few seconds later and you'd have been in the queue. Right then. I take it you would like two room keys?"

Robert and Rose nodded. The Elf handed each of them a key. "Room 503, Winky," the Elf said. "Winky will explain things and answer any questions you might have."

"Thank you," Robert said as he and Rose turned away to follow Winky. There was indeed a queue behind them of about ten people. Judging from their attire, they were all witches and wizards and represented many ages, although it was also obvious none of them were students. It seemed most knew or at least knew of each other. The Grangers only recognized one; a tall red haired man in his mid-forties.

"Merlin's beard," the man said. "Robert and Rose Granger?"

"Hello Arthur," they replied. They had first met Arthur Weasley just before Hermione's second year in Diagon Alley. During the school years since, they had been to Arthur and Molly's home a few times and Arthur had been by their place as well. Before Third Year, the two families had met in Diagon Alley again and spent a couple of days at the Leaky Cauldron together along with Hermione's best friend Harry Potter. Molly was difficult to read, but the Grangers found Arthur to be an honest, forthright and pleasant man even if he was as excited as a five year old about anything to do with the Muggle World. The truth was for the Grangers they might well have been just as excited about learning about Hermione's new life. They were just better card players than Arthur.

"This is my oldest," Arthur said indicating the long haired young man standing next to him. "Bill," he finished. "Head Boy back in his time here," he added proudly. "Now works as a Curse Breaker for Gringotts. Doing quite well for himself."

"Curse Breaker?" Robert asked.

"A lot of ancient tombs and vaults are protected by powerful ancient magics," Bill said. "My job is to find them, analyze them and break them so we can get in."

"Grave robbers?"

"More like private enterprise archeologists," Bill said. "The Goblins hate thieves and would not sink to that level. We find a tomb and analyze what we discover there. Unset or uncut gemstones we keep as we do bullion. But if an artifact has historical value of any sort, we offer it to the local authorities for a fee. Perfectly legal. If they fail to pay, we usually sell them to museums, although if there's a lot of the same stuff it may be auctioned to private collectors."

"Still," Rose began.

"You ever been to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo?" Bill asked. The Grangers shook their heads "It's huge and cramped. You walk through gallery upon gallery with the same things over and over and over again! Some of their stuff is truly unique, but a lot is repetitive. You know they have a whole room full of mummified cats? Honestly! How many do you really need?"

"So you're like Indiana Jones?" Robert said.

Bill Weasley chuckled although it was clear Arthur had no idea what that meant.

"I have seen that film," Bill chuckled. "Ever since it came out which was well before I finished school, it's popular been in my line of work. The third one as well. The second one is rubbish. But yeah, sort of. I don't wear the hat, don't have a whip and my life in the field is not nearly as exciting. No natives have tried to off me - unless you count the bloody bugs. Some of the curses I deal with are quite nasty. And when I come home, I don't stand in a classroom full of pretty girls drooling over me - pity that - but yeah, I guess that's a good analogy."

As Robert chuckled, Arthur said: "Any idea where we are? Bill and I came here to see Ginny, Fred and George who are spending the Holiday at Hogwarts. I know there's no place like this in Hogsmeade."

"Winky here told us this is the South Wing of Hogwarts itself," Rose said.

"Really?" Arthur asked in amazement. "I'd always wondered why they never thought of something like this before! Seems Dumbledore's outdone himself on this one!"

As the humans nodded no one noticed Winky's smirk.

"It's good to meet you," Rose said to Bill. "And good to see you again," she added to Arthur."

"Already checked in, I guess?" Bill asked.

Rose nodded.

"Well, we'll see you later then won't we Dad?"

"Erm," Arthur began.

"They look like they need to get settled and we don't want to hold up the queue."

"But there's no one behind us!" Arthur began.

"There was no one behind us either," Robert said. "Then there were." After shaking hands, the Grangers then followed Winky to the lift.

Their room was huge. It had a large and elegant canopied bed with two night stands followed by tall dressers. There were two sitting areas, one by the large fireplace with two high backed chairs and a couple of small tables and another near the entry with a table and four chairs. Winky explained they could use that for a private meal or tea if they desired. The fireplace was flanked by two large windows. On the wall opposite the bed there were two other doors and in between was a large and low chest of drawers with a large mirror over it. Winky explained that it was more than just a mirror. It was something they had only installed the day before. The mirror could be activated by a wand, but there were also three buttons on the frame.

The first turned it into a communication mirror, similar to a muggle telephone except you could also see the person you were talking to and you did not need to know any phone numbers. You simply pushed the button and called out the name of the person you wanted to talk to, or Room Service, Staff Service or the Infirmary. The second button accessed six different music channels. The third button turned the mirror into something not unlike a television. They could not actually pick up television signals. The Wing had its own "broadcast center" that provided the viewing to mirrors throughout the Wing. Robert picked up a large program guide. The guide showed there were fourteen different "channels" that had television shows, movies and sports broadcasts. None of it was "live." Robert asked how it worked, but Winky could only tell them it was magical.

Their bathroom was also very large. It had a double sink, a separate vanity, a huge bathtub and a separate shower. As it was located on the same wall as the windows, it had its own window that allowed light in during the day. At night or if it was dark out it had magical lighting that activated whenever someone entered and shut off when they left. There was similar lighting in the walk in closet which was through the door on the other side of their room. The closet surprised them. It was already full of clothes. Not just any clothes, they realized, it was filled with their clothes.

"Winky?" Rose asked. "What are our clothes doing here?"

Winky explained that when magicals travel and have a House Elf to assist them, they do not pack suitcases or the like. The Elf handles the luggage as it were. Even if the trip was only for a couple of days, if there was space at their destination for their wardrobe, it would be brought there by elf magic.

"This way you not be worrying about what to wear or wondering why you didn't pack something," Winky said. "It'll all go back when you do."

"I guess it makes sense in a way," Robert said.

"And Winky also be bringing other things from your home," the Elf continued. She snapped her fingers and things appeared on the walls and other places. There were pictures from their home and things Robert and Rose considered important reminders of their life

together. "Even if it is only a couple of days, it makes the room more like a home, yes?"

Rose could only nod in agreement. Robert did not know what to think, although in a way he liked it.

"Now," Winky said, "your daughter is expected back at four..."

"Expected back?" Rose asked.

"She and her friends are in London shopping - or at least looking," Winky replied. "It's now just after three so you can either unwind here or look around the Wing," Winky said before describing the Wing to the Grangers in detail. "Once she arrives, I'll see to it you get together wherever you are. You'll have a couple of hours with her before dinner. The two of you are invited to dine with her in the Private Apartments on the Third Floor tonight. It will be just like the Main Dinning Room on the Main Floor with menu service tonight. I can have a copy of the Dinner Menu sent here now, if you like."

"No," Rose said, "that's okay."

Winky then popped away.

"So we look around?" Rose suggested.

"Sounds like a plan," Robert replied.

Harry and Neville returned to the Wing after Sirius and Remus had arrived but before the Grangers or any of the others showed up. They each went to their private apartments rather than deal with the guests from the first instance. For Harry there was a part of him that did not want to deal with the adults until after they knew the truth. There was also a part of him that feared whether he would survive the truth coming out. He had nine wives between the ages of thirteen and sixteen - unadjusted for Time Compression - and eight of them had fathers. That's not to say he was not afraid of the mothers, but the fathers truly scared him. After all, it was kind of hard to say he had the best of intentions with their little girls when every single one of them was already pregnant with his child. Harry was certain Neville had similar concerns.

Harry did think it was probably worse for Hermione in a way. It had already been agreed that she would tell most of this to all of them which included her own parents. Most of the wives and guests would be dining on the Main Floor this evening. A few, however, would be dinner guests in Potter House. Among those guests would be Hermione's parents. Harry had barely even met them once a couple of years ago. And the subject of the dinner would be all that had happened and why. That would come after dinner and Harry planned to do his best to enjoy what might well be his last meal.

Harry was standing on the private balcony looking down the black lake and admiring the view thinking if he had to snuff it, he'd prefer it be here where there is at least a stunning vista. His somewhat morose musings were interrupted by a cough. He turned and saw two men on the balcony with him. One was Professor Lupin and the other was...

"Sirius!" he said and he ran over and hugged his godfather.

"Bloody hell, Harry," Sirius laughed, "what are they feeding you? You've grown a foot since last year!"

"Erm - well maybe," Harry said as he stepped back. "My most recent growth spurt was only a little over six inches."

"You're taller than me!" Sirius protested. Harry was only slightly taller than his godfather, but he had grown some even before he took the potions.

"Growth potions," Harry said. "I'm told I should have been on them earlier but wasn't for some reason. I'm told this is the height I should be for my age and would've been had I not lived with the Dursleys."

Sirius nodded. One day the Dursleys would be paid a visit, that much was for certain. "Still stuck with the glasses, though," he said.

Harry shrugged. "My Dad had them too. Guess bad eyesight is a Potter thing and can't be blamed on the Dursleys."

"And you're not all scrawny anymore," Sirius said.

Harry nodded. "You've had a chance to look around?"



Sirius nodded.

"See the gym and swimming pool?"

He nodded again.

"Been working out - a lot."

"Your Elf Dobby told us a little about this place," Sirius said.

"Obviously not everything," Remus added.

Harry nodded. "I had little to do with it. It was mostly done when I first came here and what was done since was mostly the Elves."

"How did you lot do this?" Sirius asked eagerly. "I admit I'm more than a little envious. Even when we Marauders were here, we never pulled a stunt like this! You stole a whole wing of the castle!"

"We had permission to use any unused portion of the castle for training for the Tournament. We know Dumbledore knew that as McGonagall told us he approved it."

"I seriously doubt he meant this," Remus said.

Harry shrugged. "Neither he nor McGonagall placed any restrictions on the permission other than the place could not be currently in use."

"And the renovations?" Remus asked. "How are they a part of the training?"

"Did Dobby tell you how long they took?" Harry asked in reply.

"He told us the number of hours you lot spent on just renovating this wing."

Harry nodded. That was what Dobby was allowed to reveal. "I'm told the renovations began March 19th ... of this year."

"But that's less than two weeks ago!"

"For you," Harry smirked. "For this Wing, it was over twenty-one months ago."

Sirius looked confused. Remus seemed to ponder this for a moment. "Time Compression!" he said after a bit.

Harry nodded.

"What's that?" Sirius asked.

"It's bloody difficult is what it is," Remus replied. "You mean this whole wing is under it?"

"Not at this moment," Harry said. "Got guests arriving, don't we and some of us are still in London. You activate that Ward and no one can enter or leave."

"What the bloody hell are you two talking about?" Sirius asked.

"A Time Compression Ward alters the rate at which time flows within the warded space," Remus replied. "It explains Harry's growth. He is probably several months older than he otherwise would be."

"Our compression ratio was two minutes equals a day," Harry said. "With the ward up, for every two minutes outside, a day passed in here. The ward extends far enough from the Wing to include the balconies. Hermione says it's also a brutal defensive ward. You try and cross it when it's up and the temporal rift will at best make you wish you were under the Cruciatus Curse and at worst rip you to pieces."

"How long?" Remus asked.

"For me? Wednesday morning was the first time I was here. For me that was 273 days ago or so. That's why it's so ... comfortable. I spent months here in relative isolation training and stuff. It was just me, my friend Neville and a couple of girls..."

"Couple of girls?" Sirius asked. "Do tell!"

Harry ignored him. "Given the intensity of the training and studies, we needed a relaxing environment to retire to when the day was done. A day here or there, we could have roughed it. But nine

months? Hermione and the others who made this place spent an hour a day for eleven days making this place happen - that's 330 days. Their first sixty days or so were spent on camp beds in a large, open, empty room. They can all tell you that was no fun at all."

"And the guest rooms?" Remus asked.

"We figured why not?" Harry replied. "We had the space and this is a Holiday so why not be able to invite family up here to enjoy a weekend together and put them up in style? I'm told the inns in Hogsmeade are rather basic."

"You could say that."

"And after this year? After this Holiday? What do you plan on doing with this? You honestly think Dumbledore will let you keep this?"

Harry smirked. "You'll learn that tomorrow. But I'll give you the conclusion. He won't have a choice!"

"What do you mean he won't have a choice?"

"Tomorrow," Harry said firmly. "Now, would you two like a tour of my Private Apartments before the other dinner guests arrive?"

The guests began arriving right around six. Actually, Hermione and her parents and Hannah and her mother were there earlier getting tours of their daughters private rooms. Hermione had selected the dinner guests. They were chosen for many reasons but the two most important were a couple of them posed the most risk to Sirius Black and the others could verify the facts and legalities about what had occurred. They would be the first to learn most of the truth, it having already been decided that the Founders' Heirs would not be revealed until all the guests learned the truth the next afternoon.

Hermione was here because much of this was her idea and the rest ... well she was the leader of the group that did this. That meant her parents were here as well. Sirius Black and Remus Lupin were on the list as they were for all practical purposes the only trust worthy adults in Harry's life. Neville was here with his Gran as this concerned House Longbottom. It also concerned House Abbott and House Bones, which meant that Hannah was here with her mother and Susan with her Aunt, who being the head of DMLE might be

able to do something about Sirius's situation as that would be the first topic of discussion. The Tonks and Turpin families rounded out the list. Andy Tonks and her daughter "Don't Call Me Nymphadora" were cousins to both Harry and Sirius and Andy's husband Ted was a Healer. Lisa Turpin was there with her parents, her father also being a Healer.

"Siri!" a voice practically screamed as the guests began to arrive and a pink haired witch threw herself at Sirius Black. He looked confused. "Don't say you don't remember your favorite cousin," she said with a pout.

Sirius blinked. "Nymphadora?" he asked.

"Right in one, but DON'T CALL ME THAT!"

"You've grown," Sirius observed, "and you used to like your name."

"Course I've grown!" she said. "I was eight the last time we saw each other! We've missed you! As for my name, I liked it right up until I started Hogwarts. Do you have any idea how many mean and perverted nicknames that name caused?"

"I can guess."

"DON'T!"

"Hello, Siri," another female voice said.

"Andy!" Sirius said. "Merlin it's been ages!"

Andromeda Tonks hugged her cousin. "Ted and I never believed that rubbish about you," she whispered to him. She then stood back. "You're a little thin, but I like the hair."

"The Elf that did this is a bloody butcher," he replied running his hands through his short hair.

"You almost look respectable," Andy smirked.

"Technically, I suppose I'm supposed to arrest you now," Tonks said.

"Oh? They let little girls do that?" Sirius quipped.

"No, but they let Aurors do that, which is what I am as of last month. I work for Kingsley Shacklebolt. Our official job is to find you. We both don't believe the rubbish about you either so officially he's reporting you're in Tibet most likely. So officially, I can't possibly have bumped into you, can I?"

Sirius chuckled.

"I'm rather disappointed at your attitude, Miss Tonks," a female voice said.

Sirius saw Tonks pale and looked at the new guest. He recognized her immediately. It was Amy Smyth, now known as Amelia Bones. She was a couple of years ahead of him back in school. He had asked her out a few times, but his family's reputation had been known to her and as she was Muggle Born, she had kindly turned him down.

"She's the Head of DMLE," Tonks whispered to him.

"I may have spent twelve years in hell and the last couple on the run, but I'm not totally clueless," Sirius replied. He then looked at Amelia. "I suppose you're going to clap me in irons now or some such?"

"Why would I do that?" Amelia replied.

"You have the fugitive mass murderer in front of you..." Sirius began.

"Never believed that rubbish myself," Amelia said. "You were too much the rebel to kiss the robes of any wizard. I was in no position then and I only began looking into your case after you escaped, Sirius. There were certainly ... irregularities. I now have reason to believe you're no more a mass murderer than I am a singing star. And despite what the Minister says and Prophet prints, it's not a crime to escape Azkaban - probably 'cause no one's done it before you. Now that bit does pique my curiosity. More recently, however, I've received information from my Niece who swears it's accurate and who got it from Miss Granger that suggests fairly convincingly that you were innocent all along."

"I appreciate that," Sirius began.

"Did you do it?" Amelia asked. "Did you kill those Muggles?"

"No," Sirius said. "That was Peter Pettigrew."

"An unregistered rat animagus as I understand it and a Death Eater," she said.

Sirius nodded.

"Would you be willing to testify under veritiserum?"

"With Fudge around? The bloody bastard was going to have me kissed by a Dementor the last time he had his mitts on me!"

"WHAT? He may be the Minister for Magic but he legally lacks that authority! Only the Wizengamot can impose that penalty! His bloody infatuation with those creatures is unnatural! He and I are going to have words and as he can't fire me and I am affiliated with an Ancient and Noble House, the fat bastard better listen or I'll have him investigated! And I doubt his political career is clean enough to survive an inquiry! Again, would you testify under veritiserum to those events?"

"Yes."

"Pensieve memory as well?"

"You know as well as I do those are not admissible evidence," Sirius began.

"Not for proving someone else did it for certain," Amelia replied. "There are many ways a criminal can mess with a witness - Polyjuice potion for one. But for proving you did not, as long as your memory has not been altered it has always been conclusive for ruling out suspects."

Sirius nodded.

"I can't make any promises, Siri," she continued, "not until I am confident Fudge and his cronies are boxed in so tight they can't obstruct justice. But I do have one question for you."

"Oh?"

"Why didn't you appeal your incarceration? It always bothered me."

"Appeal?"

"Surely you know you had a year to appeal which would have forced a trial?"

"Um ... I guess I forgot. It's not like anyone can think straight in that place!"

"Any other reasons," Amelia asked feeling there was more.

Sirius sighed. "I guess I kind of felt I deserved it."

"Oh?"

"Dumbledore told Lily and James to change Secret Keepers when Fabian Prewett was murdered. I was their Secret Keeper and recommended Pettigrew. They did it and were dead a couple of days later. In my mind, I as good as killed them!"

"Did you know Pettigrew was going to betray them?"

"No. He seemed the least likely to be a traitor."

"The best ones usually are that way - always the ones you'd least suspect."

Sirius nodded sadly.

"You didn't kill James and Lily," Amelia said. "You-Know-Who did. You didn't betray them. Pettigrew did. If you didn't know he was a traitor, then you are not responsible for what happened to James and Lily. And if you did not kill those Muggles ... You were sent to prison 'cause two Aurors saw most of what happened. They couldn't say who did it. Only that Pettigrew accused you of betraying the Potters and then it all blew up and he was destroyed in the blast and you were there laughing like a maniac! You never testified or confessed. I never believed you did it. I believed you were emotionally distraught."

Sirius nodded.

"I can't make you any promises," she said. "I can't say I can have this cleared up in no time. Fudge has invested too much in making you his bugbear and getting loads of press about it to just change his spots. But I will try. Just do me a favor and don't do anything stupid."

"You know me, or at least you used to," Sirius chuckled.

"That's what I'm afraid of. Just keep out of sight. Please?" she pleaded. "I've lost to many people I care about, Siri."

"I'll try," he replied. "I have to! For Harry!"

Amelia smiled. "So, for now why not escort me to dinner?"

"Y-you mean like a date?"

She almost giggled. "Maybe," she said slowly. "But like a friend will do as well."

"I would be honored, fair maiden!" Sirius said.

"You were always over the top," Amelia chuckled. "So let's see what kind of food they serve here!"



FRIDAY, MARCH 31st, 1995 - THE SOUTH WING, POTTER APARTMENTS.

Augusta Longbottom was seventy-six years old. Born Augusta Caldwell in 1918 she was a distant relation of the duelist although she did not know that and no relation whatsoever to Laura, at least not within the last ten generations or more. By all rights she and her husband Devon Longbottom should be celebrating their fiftieth wedding anniversary this coming summer. She was from an ancient Pureblood line, although one which was Pureblood more by accident than design. Her Caldwell line could trace their magic back unbroken for a thousand years. Ancient Lines were those that could trace their magic back unbroken to the founding of Hogwarts and had sent generations of their children to the venerable school. But the Caldwell's were not of a Noble line. The Ancient and Noble lines were also descended from nobility. They had been Earls or Barons or such and served the Muggle Kings at least until around the Twelfth Century.

Devon Longbottom was the Heir Apparent of such a line when he started courting Augusta not long after she attained her Potions Mastery. They had known each other in school, but had not dated at that time. He had a younger brother called Algie. That was not his real first name and no one really knew what it had been except Devon and his parents. Devon and Augusta married in 1944 when she was twenty-six. However, for many years they were unable to have a child. She suffered no less than five miscarriages, which was practically unheard of in the magical world and suggestive of a curse of some sort. Algie had also married and lost his wife in child birth losing his child as well. Again, that was practically unheard of.

Augusta finally gave birth to a son in 1956 who they named Frank. Frank married his wife Alice Owens just after they completed Auror training in 1977. They had been classmates in school and through training. She was also a Pureblood from an Ancient line through her mother's family. Her mother had been a Black, although from a disowned line. It should have been a nice life for Augusta and her family. They were well placed in society and quite wealthy. But the War changed everything. The War destroyed so many lives and families needlessly and tragically. Led by fanatical Purebloods who wanted a Pureblood dominated world, it had actually gone a long way towards destroying everything in Augusta's opinion. About one fifth of the Pureblood lines that were known to exist in 1970 were

gone by 1982. Many others that were left were but shadows of themselves and it was not just because most of the Death Eaters were from those families. The Purebloods who stood against them were targeted for elimination.

She had little use for Death Eaters and those who agreed with them. The Death Eaters had all but wiped out House Longbottom. They had killed her husband and all but killed her son and daughter-in-law. Her own Caldwell family had fared better, but only because they had fled the country altogether.

She had little use for the Ministry of Magic. They had done nothing for far too long. True, beginning around 1974, it seemed they had a new Minister for Magic every couple of months and with that a new policy. Some were assassinated, many ousted on votes of "No Confidence" and at least two chucked into Azkaban for being Death Eaters. They seemed far too concerned about not offending Pureblood sensibilities than dealing with the Death Eaters who were no better than rabid dogs and deserved no better in her opinion. While they dithered, the very Purebloods they tried not to offend were being slaughtered along with everyone else it seemed.

She had no use for Albus Dumbledore. As far as she was concerned, he was and always had been little more than a school teacher and should have stuck to that. While his Order of the Phoenix had been formed because their government was not dealing with the problem, in her opinion it was unable to do anything either. It had convinced some people that the Death Eaters were evil and probably stopped some from joining. But it was too weak and too weakly led to make a difference. How many died because Albus was unwilling to kill the enemy? In her mind, Albus was the reason why her son and daughter-in-law now lived in the Long Term Care Ward at St. Mungo's. He had been the one to convince Frank not to name her as Secret Keeper when Fabian Prewett had been murdered. The person he had suggested was one of the four who attacked her family in November 1981! The only reason her grandson Neville was alive is he had been with her that day and not with his parents.

Her own Caldwell family had never returned after it was over. While she was addressed as Madam Longbottom, Augusta could put on airs and demand to be called as Dowager or Regent Longbottom, although she rarely did. Neville was all that was left of an Ancient and Noble House and she was his Magical and Custodial Guardian.

She was a mother again at the age of 63. In many ways, he was really all she had left and she knew she had been overprotective of the boy. She knew he was magical, but he was also the most laid back and easy going little boy she had ever been around. He never got upset and seldom got scared and certainly not enough for a burst of accidental magic (save the time Algie chucked the poor lad out a third story window for which the Granduncle would spend six weeks in St. Mungo's for the hexing he received.)

Augusta Longbottom had not seen her grandson since September 1st. He looked different. He was well dressed, but that was not it. He might have grown an inch or so, but that was not it either. He had certainly become more muscular, but again that was not it. It was his face, or more accurately the expression that was new. He smiled more, seemed more open than she remembered and far more confident. He was looking more and more like a young man and Head of an honorable family and less like the shy and forgetful (yet loveable) little boy she had placed on the train over three years ago.

He had told her that this place was part of Hogwarts. She found that impossible to believe. It looked nothing like what she remembered and certainly not like a castle. It was more like a very new Manor of some kind but when he brought her to a balcony on the Fourth Floor and she looked around, she recognized the surrounding countryside. She could clearly see Hogsmeade, the valley, the Black Lake and mountains, the forest and the walls of the castle itself. She tried to get him to explain and glared at him when he refused and told her it would all be made clear "later." That glare had always worked in the past. This time – well at least he flinched a little, but he said nothing except they would be having dinner in the House "downstairs."

She found the affair to be very informal by her standards. Then again, it was not as if she had taught her charge much about such things. She had not entertained since before her husband's murder which was before Neville had even been born and she had not seen it as necessary to teach such things to Neville as a young lad. As she recalled, Frank had taken no interest in such things until he was approaching his majority and even then not so much. The hosting of a traditional dinner was, after all, the province of the Hostess be it the wife or mother or some other and the Elves. Still, she was planning to teach him the customs and traditions of such things because one day he would be the Head of an Ancient and Noble House.

The guests mingled in the large sitting room of House Potter as it was called. Apparently the apartments where Neville stayed was House Longbottom. Augusta wondered about this. She seriously doubted Dumbledore would have encouraged such pretensions. And yet, aside from the obvious comfort and space, neither Neville nor his friend acted pretentious at all. The whole situation was confusing. Were they at Longbottom Manor, Neville would be in for a right scolding. They were not and there were others present. Neville promised her it would all be explained and she held her tongue for now.

Neville had five other guests with him only two of whom she knew and only one of whom she had ever met. She knew Amelia Bones, of course. Madam Bones was in addition to being the Head of DMLE the proxy holder in the Wizengamot for the House Bones votes. The two had worked together in that body on many occasions. The young lady with Madam Bones was her niece Susan, the last of that bloodline and Ancient and Noble House. Augusta had heard about the girl both from Madam Bones and from Neville as Neville had considered her a friend of sorts practically since First Year and had mentioned her in letters and in conversation. Augusta knew there was a Line Continuation Contract between the families but had never told Neville this. Still, it was good to learn that the two knew each other and seemed to like each other given that in all probability they would be bound one day.

She had also heard of the other young woman in Neville's party. Neville counted Lisa Turpin as a friend as well at least since Second Year. Augusta was pleased he had friends outside of his own house, although wondered what it meant that they were both girls. She really did not want the lad to grow up to be a rake. She knew little about the girl's family. Her parents were both Half-Bloods and "Turpin" was actually a name from a non-magical line that had gained its magic some five generations ago. Al Turpin was a Healer at St. Mungo's. His wife Cynthia was his Assistant.

Harry Potter would not have been what Augusta expected had it not been for Neville's descriptions of the real person. The Harry Potter of the public's imagination and of the press's reporting simply did not exist in this young man at all. She expected a degree of arrogance and bravado yet found nothing more than a quiet confidence. He seemed more interested in what others had to say than about telling

of his own exploits. He was even reticent to discuss the first two Tasks which had left the boy in First Place in the Tournament despite his youth and lack of training in comparison with the other Champions. The closest he came to bragging was when he said that he somehow managed to muddle through it so far and had a lot of help from his friends in doing so essentially giving them as much if not more credit for his success thus far than he was willing to give himself. While many would relish his fame especially at his age, it was clear he loathed it. Of the Potter's she had met, Harry was the least arrogant and most down to earth. It was perhaps a blessing in a way that he was the last, Augusta thought. Should his line continue with him as the example...

Of young Harry's guests, the only one Augusta knew or had even met before was Andromeda Tonks. She had been a Black before she married her Husband Ted and therefore was a distant relation. Ted was a Muggle Born and they eloped while still in school voiding an important marriage contract between her family and House Malfoy. Ted was now a successful Healer and Andy was Potions Mistress for St. Mungo's whereas her former betrothed was a loathsome social climber of the worst sort. Augusta believed this was the far better match, but Andy's parents had not and disowned her as had most the Blacks of that generation. Oddly, Arcturus Black never did and he was the Head of that Ancient and Noble House. In the end, only his word could truly cut her off.

With Andy and her husband was their daughter Nymphadora. The young woman had been in her final year at Hogwarts the same year Neville had started and had just completed Auror training. Andy's daughter remained in the line of succession and should her daughter have a son, that boy could be the next Lord Black. Augusta knew the Malfoy's believed that their son Draco was next in line, but that proved how little they knew about Ancient and Noble Houses. Draco was the son of Andy's younger sister. The line passed to the closest male descendant which would be determined through Andy's line should a son be born to her daughter before Draco turned twenty-five.

All of that assumed there were no senior lines remaining with superior claims. In actuality, there were two that survived that had not been disowned by a prior Head of House. They were the surviving males of Andy and Narcissa's generation. One was by law and custom Head of House, although as a fugitive and murderer

Sirius Black would probably never come into his birthright. The other shared the same Great-Grandfather with Andy and Narcissa and was in this room. Harry Potter the Heir Apparent to the Ancient and Noble House of Potter was also de facto Heir Apparent to the Ancient and Noble House of Black behind Sirius Black, although Augusta doubted he would accept both titles as that carried with it the responsibility to produce and heir for both lines which usually meant the need for multiple wives.

Augusta also met Hermione Granger whom Neville had spoken most highly of in the past and considered his friend. This Augusta relayed to the young woman, along with Neville's opinion that she and Harry had been "an item" for a few years now but just hadn't figured that out yet. Hermione blushed. Oddly the two adults with her seemed unsurprised. The woman told Augusta that she and her husband were of the same opinion. Augusta was surprised to learn that the two were Hermione's parents. She knew the girl was Muggle Born. But as far as she could recall no Muggle parent had ever been to Hogwarts in ages. When she was in school, some did venture to the school and were allowed to see it. The story was early in Dumbledore's tenure as Headmaster a Muggle parent had complained about the "primitive" conditions of the school itself and he had changed the policy which Augusta always thought was at best petty on his part and certainly short sighted. The Grangers seemed more than pleased with their accommodations although they conceded getting used to all the magic might take a bit of time.

Augusta had never met Marilyn Abbott before or her daughter Hannah however she knew who they were. It was hard not to given that Hannah was the last of an Ancient and Noble House just as Harry, Neville and Susan were. During the War, the remaining Ancient and Noble lines dropped from nine to eight with the demise of the McMillan Line and four other lines nearly disappeared as well. The other lines were the Blacks, Averys, Selwyns and Dumbledores and the latter of the four would not survive much longer as only Albus and his brother Albeforth remained and neither had ever had children that anyone knew of. Three of those lines had Death Eater connections and while they suffered losses, they were not on the verge of dying off. Given the political pull those Houses had, Augusta was certain Voldemort was trying to rid Britain of the Houses that could stop his plans if they ever had a majority working together. Oddly, Dumbledore had managed to convince House Potter to side with him in preventing such a majority from forming for

either side. He convinced Harry's grandfather that with the Death Eaters about, harsh action by the Houses would be counterproductive and neither side should gain an advantage within the nobility. Augusta had learned this when she was present for an argument between Dumbledore and her husband not long before her husband was killed.

The presence of the Abbott and Bones families got her thinking. She felt it was highly probable the Abbotts had a similar Line Continuation Contract with House Potter. Two other girls and their parents were present, one as Neville's guests and the others as Harry's. Perhaps they would be announcing the necessary betrothals to continue both lines?

There were two other men present. One was introduced as Professor Remus Lupin. Neville had spoke highly of him last year and was very disappointed that he would not return to teach Defense Against the Dark Arts this year.

"I'll never understand why Dumbledore let you go," Augusta said to him.

"Actually I resigned," Remus said.

"Oh. Well I guess that makes more sense. Not everyone enjoys teaching."

"Oh no! I did enjoy it."

"This had nothing to do with your being a werewolf?"

Remus blinked.

"It seems it wasn't that big a secret," she continued. "I knew by the Christmas holidays."

"Umm..."

"Neville always complained when you missed your classes because he hated your substitute. It doesn't take a genius to figure out it happened at the full moon. That leaves us with but one conclusion. I never understood that attitude. I mean you're only a potential danger a few hours a month between moonrise and sunrise. As long as

you're responsible about it – and I've known people with your condition who are – I don't see the issue. Let me guess. Some politically connected Slytherin complained and Dumbledore refused to stand up to them?"

"I'm sure it's not that."

"Don't be so sure when it comes to that man. Giving him the benefit of the doubt he does mean well about most things, but he lacks the backbone to do anything about his good intentions really." She then went on a twenty minute rant about Dumbledore and his good intentions and how he always backed away from doing something about it if it meant resistance. "To this day," she concluded, "I am forced to wonder how many people died needlessly in the War because he refused to allow us to take the steps necessary to end the war when we could have! That man is far more concerned with his bloody honors and positions and keeping them than he is about actually taking a risk and using those positions to make this world a better place! He's all talk – which is often fine. But there comes a time when talk is cheap and action is required and he has no stomach for that!"

"I'm sure you're mistaken."

"Are you? Do you know that a bill was introduced in the Wizengamot in 1974 after the Death Eaters killed the Minister for Magic that might have ended the war quickly – a Bill substantially similar to the Emergency Act of 1979 that started to have an effect when implemented? Do you know that he stalled it for five years? He opposed it because it allowed our side to kill Death Eaters and to treat them as War Prisoners and not criminals – that means we could toss them in Prison without a trial just for being marked or were caught red handed at the scene of an attack! The Bill allowed us to impoverish their families and deny them government services and protections! In 1970 there were 80,000 magicals in Britain. After the war there were less than 50,000. Those who were not killed by Death Eaters fled before them! Dumbledore considered fighting back, meeting force with force, too harsh! How many more of us had to flee or die before he would see sense? We passed that bill over his objections when his coalition with the Death Eater votes collapsed after You-Know-Who killed a few prominent ones in a fit of rage! If something like that ever happens again, I intend to move for his immediate removal as Chief Warlock! We can't afford to play



nice as our world is crashing down around us, but that's what he would have us do!"

Remus said nothing. The man next to him spoke. "I agree with you in principal, Madam Longbottom. But for myself, I do have issue with the 'chuck 'em in Azkaban and forget about 'em' bit."

"Oh?"

"I'm Sirius Black," he said with a smile.

Augusta was not certain which was more of a shock: that the most wanted man in the magical world was standing before her or that she seemed to be the only one in the room who did not know. The Head of DMLE and the Auror knew and he was still a free man!

The Dining Room in the House Potter Apartments was actually fairly large. It was laid out to accommodate up to forty diners and various seating arrangements; magic having the ability to alter the number and shape of the table or tables in the room to suit the House needs. On this evening, the table would seat eighteen and it was round. Hermione felt this would better facilitate discussion and also not require anyone to sit at the head or foot of the table. The guests mostly took random seats around the table. There were four exceptions. Hermione sat across from Harry and Neville across from Susan. There were menus at all of the places and as the guests finished making their orders, Harry rose.

"It will be a little while before the appetizers," he said. "We said we would explain all of this to you tonight and we shall; or I should say Hermione shall as this Wing is her idea and what led to this Wing was her project, although she had a lot of help. I will only say two things. First, the ultimate question is why? Finally, the answer is because Dumbledore cannot be trusted. Hermione?"

Harry sat as several voices spoke at once and Hermione stood. "This project began when Harry's name came out of the Goblet of Fire. I knew he had not wanted to have any part of this silly tournament! I also knew he was not ready for it, certainly not as ready as the others. He needed help and I wanted to know why this happened. I found out I was not alone in this. Every student here tonight is a part of this project in his or her own way.

"This Wing was an abandoned wing of the school. According to Hogwarts: A History it used to house classrooms and extra dormitories back when this school had around a thousand students. It was not been used except on rare occasion since the 1400's. Professor McGonagall gave Harry and me permission to use any unused part of the castle to train him for the tournament..."

"A whole wing?" Amelia Bones asked.

"It was within the rather broadly worded permission," Hermione said, "and we are using it for its intended purpose; but in the course of trying to figure out how Harry got into this mess in the first place and whether we could get him out of it ... let's just say for now this goes well beyond some silly tournament and this Wing is to prepare for the well beyond as well. We will begin almost at the beginning. There was a beginning which led to here, but first we see how it led to here."

Hermione began with the events in October 1981 ending in the arrest and imprisonment of Sirius Black on November 1st 1981. Fortunately, few noted her introduction as everyone believed that was the beginning of the Harry Potter story at least to the extent that they knew of it. Needless to say, there were questions.

"Dumbledore recommended Pettigrew?" Amelia asked.

Sirius shrugged. "He wanted an Order member. The rat was one of his options. Lily and James wanted each other figuring it would be hard to snuff the Secret Keeper if he or she was under the Fidelius Charm. Dumbledore was opposed as it made access to 'reliable' members all but impossible."

"Said the same thing to me when I asked to replace Fabian Prewett," Augusta said. "He recommended the bastard who led the Death Eaters to my son and daughter-in-law!"

"Didn't he know they were Death Eater spies?" Nymphadora Tonks asked.

"Probably not," Amelia Bones replied. "The spies were usually ... well, there's magic that can hide certain thought from all but a deliberate interrogation. That and he had ways of hiding the Dark Mark as well. Wouldn't do much good for a spy to have a brand such

as that on their arm as a dead giveaway. The Marks could only be revealed by killing the marked person or, as we found later, when You-Know-Who snuffed it."

"You were thrown in prison for twelve years without a trial?" Rose Granger asked. Sirius merely shrugged.

"He was incarcerated under the Emergency Acts then in effect," Amelia Bones explained. "Two off duty Aurors witnessed the altercation in the Muggle market. They saw Mr. Black accosted and accused by another wizard – Peter Pettigrew – and spell fire and the resulting explosion. Twelve Muggles were dead and Pettigrew was believed to have been blown to pieces and Mr. Black remained. He was incarcerated for Death Eater activities, not for being a Death Eater or even the deaths that occurred."

"It similar to being a prisoner of war," Hermione elaborated. "He was stuck there without recourse until the Ministry declared the War over."

"And even then," Amelia continued, "his incarceration had to be appealed. He had a year to do so and did not. He's told me that he wasn't exactly in his right mind at the time and given the nature of that prison that's not surprising. But there were others who could have appealed on his behalf and they did not either."

"Who?" several voices asked.

"His family, for one," Amelia said.

"That wasn't going to happen," Sirius grumbled. "My father was already dead. It seems my mother was pleased as punch that I proved to be the good Pureblood bigoted bastard she had hoped I would become and felt I should be honored to rot in prison for the Cause. My Grandfather... Don't get me wrong. He was a dyed in the wool Pureblood bigot. But he was also the Head of an Ancient and Noble House and I was the Heir Apparent after father died. When the Death Eaters began targeting the other Ancient and Noble Houses, my father, brother and I were forbidden from having anything to do with them. Regulus was his mother's son and joined up and was promptly disowned by Grandfather as was Narcissa Malfoy and her descendants and Bellatrix Lestrange and hers to the fifth generation once he learned that they or their husbands had

taken the Mark. Don't think they knew that. I know 'cause Granddad was one of the only ones who came to see me. He did not disown me as he saw I never took the Mark, but the political situation was such he could not appeal my incarceration either. With many other Death Eaters getting off on flimsy excuses, the Ministry was not about to check on those of us who they had caught and imprisoned. This was after my time to appeal on my own behalf had expired."

After a few moments silence, Amelia continued. "The law also allowed the Head of DMLE to investigate the incarceration and the Head of the Wizengamot or Minister for Magic to demand an investigation."

"If there had been an appeal, what would have happened?" Rose Granger asked.

"DMLE would have had to conduct a full investigation. The Head would have to decide whether there was sufficient evidence of real criminal activity to submit the case to a full trial and, if there was not, was required to set the prisoner free. Otherwise, the case would go to trial."

"And Sirius would have been acquitted," Harry noted.

"From what I've learned recently, that is probably what would have happened. But Barty Crouch was Head of DMLE then and was not about to cut any suspected Death Eater any breaks nor second guess himself. He was ousted from the job when it turned out that his son was a Death Eater and had continued to act as such after You-Know-Who vanished. Crouch was replaced by Dedalus Diggle, a Dumbledore crony who hadn't been an Auror since well before the war and who, in my opinion, was spineless. I replaced him when Mr. Black escaped and began looking into his case then and noted discrepancies. But I could not appeal his incarceration as he was ... well ... no longer incarcerated.

"As for the Minister for Magic, Bagnold was almost as rabid a Death Eater hater as Crouch. Fudge could care less, at least until Mr. Black escaped and now I doubt he'd give Mr. Black a chance. Black is to be executed upon capture at least if Fudge has any say about it and for now he does. Now why Dumbledore never looked into it is another thing altogether. Then again, the Head of the Wizengamot would need some cause to do so."

"That law seems rather – er – extreme," Rose Granger said.

"Arguably most of the Emergency Act was," Amelia nodded. "We were losing the war and falling into slavery and darkness. We had been treating Death Eaters as criminals and individual ones at that and not as an enemy force bent on our destruction. You cannot fight a war the same way you deal with criminals! Those laws did not turn the tide, but they stopped the slide. At the time the War ended, it had become a stalemate. It was still bloody and the losses continued to mount, but now the enemy was losing their people as well."

After a pause, Rose Granger asked: "How did you escape?"

"Why did you escape?" Amelia added quickly.

"As to the how," Sirius began. He then stood and turned into a huge, black dog long enough for everyone to notice before changing back. "I'm an unregistered Animagus," he said. "James Potter, Peter Pettigrew and I became such while we were still in school. Probably the only real crime I ever committed, although 'bout all DMLE can really do to me is make me register and pay a fine, seeing as I never used my ability to do anything criminal."

"Aside from escaping prison," Robert began.

"Actually, that was not a crime," Amelia said. "No one had ever done it before so no one thought to make it a crime to do so. Why didn't you escape sooner?"

"No reason really," Sirius said. "As the dog, I found the dementors had little effect on me although it was still right depressing. I could sense when they were about and would turn into the dog. That and having a fur coat was a good idea as that place is bloody cold regardless. When the human guards were about, I'd turn back into me. But I really had not thought of busting out."

"Then one day Minister Fudge came around for an inspection or some such and said a few words to me from beyond the bars of my cell. I think he was a little shocked to see I wasn't a total nut case. I saw he had a copy of the Daily Prophet and asked him if I could

have it. It was the only way to find out what was going on outside really and I do enjoy the crosswords. That issue was why I escaped.

"On the front page was a picture of the Weasley family. It seems they had won a Sweepstakes and were touring Egypt. The article said the youngest five were still at Hogwarts and there on the shoulder of one of them was none other than the rat Peter Pettigrew. The man I trusted and who betrayed us all was with the Weasley boy and he was in school with Harry! I had promised myself I'd kill the rat one day if I could and the murdering bastard was near my Godson! So, one night when a guard left my cell door ajar – they did that from time to time as we prisoners really were not a flight risk – I became the dog and got out. The dementors never noticed me at all and ... well, there really is nothing but them between you and the outside. Course, I had to swim for it and it took days to recover from that, but..."

Hermione then began to detail Harry's life up until the past few months. Dumbledore had left him with his maternal Aunt where he had suffered years of abuse and neglect, the full extent of which even she did not know. She did emphasize that this was not normal behavior. Had the Muggle authorities learned of it, Harry would have been removed from that home at the very least. In all probability, Harry's Cousin Dudley may have been as well and his Aunt and Uncle charged as criminals.

As their guests ate their appetizers, salads and soups, Hermione went through Harry's first three years at school. It was not so much a description of classes or day-to-day life, except when complaining about the first two years of Defense classes, rather it was their extra-curricular adventures. Some of the events were told in far greater detail than the Grangers had heard before. Hermione could not explain why the "official" school version was so terse, but explained that she had not told it in detail because she was afraid her parents might pull her out of school. They probably would have back then, they admitted. They were less inclined to do so now seeing as she seemed more than up for those kinds of challenges, but they reserved the right to change their minds.

The first shocking revelation was that Voldemort might not truly be dead and that he had somehow possessed a teacher first year and a student second year. Everyone who had not heard the tales wondered why Dumbledore would even think of hiding an object as

valuable or as coveted as the Philosopher's Stone in a school, much less guard it with traps that a handful of First Years could break with some ease. They also wondered why he took no action regarding Quirrel. After all, in hindsight it was obvious Snape suspected the man and everyone agreed with Hermione it was unlikely Snape kept his suspicions to himself. As for second year, they wondered why there did not seem to be a major investigation, although could not fault Dumbledore for the final attack as he was suspended from the school at that time.

"How big was that thing?" Sirius asked regarding the basilisk Harry had killed with a sword in the end.

Harry shrugged. "Never bothered to measure it. It was bloody huge. The thing was thicker than I was tall at the time and reared up to more than twice my height I guess. Fifty feet? Maybe bigger?"

"Why didn't Dumbledore deal with it or one of the other Professors?" Rose Granger asked.

Harry shrugged. "Never asked. As far as we knew they didn't know what it was, although even if they did they didn't know where the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets was and could not access it even if they did. I could, but that's because I'm a parselmouth."

There were some gasps from the older magical families, although all the students had known this since Second Year.

"As was his father," Remus said. "That talent runs in his family."

"Although it's not one they advertise for obvious reasons," Sirius concluded.

"Might be obvious to you," Robert Granger said, "but some of us know little about your world."

"The talent is often associated with Dark Magic," Hermione said. "Truth is it's nothing of the sort. The opinion is based upon the fact that Salazar Slytherin was believed to have gone dark and Voldemort had that talent as well."

For the most part, Third Year turned out to be the least exciting. Hermione spoke of the dementors, her Time Turner and Harry

learning the Patronus Charm. The later was met with disbelief by all the magical adults save Remus and Sirius so a demonstration was in order. Not long after Harry's stag was prancing around the table it was followed by an otter, a swan, a badger, a hawk and finally a massive bear from Neville.

"He's taught us as well," Neville said looking at his Gran.

"But that can take months to learn," Ted Tonks said. "Even then many can't do that even as fully trained witches and wizards!"

Neville shrugged. "Aside from the wand issue, I had it down in a few weeks..."

"That's not your father's wand," Augusta noted.

Neville shrugged. "Dad's wand never really was a match for me. I got this one a couple of days ago."

"But family wands usually..." Augusta began.

Neville nodded. "Usually, but not always. Even then, a wand that is matched to you first is always better than any other or so we've been told by a couple of wandmakers."

"I ... I'm sorry, Neville dear. I didn't know."

Neville shrugged. "Neither did I, really. Aside from you the whole family thought I was borderline so when I was I thought so too. Apparently it was just the wand, not me."

There was no need to go over the true story of Sirius Black again. This version focused only on the day he and Buckbeak the hippogriff escaped from Hogwarts. Amelia Bones had already noted that the Minister for Magic wanted him dead. What puzzled everyone was why Dumbledore had assisted in the escape.

"For better or for worse," Augusta Longbottom said, "the man had no stomach for nor would condone killing under any circumstances."

"That's certainly part of it," Hermione agreed. "But there is more."



Hermione then told the gathering about Harry's surprise entry into the Tournament. He had not placed his name in the Goblet of Fire nor asked anyone to do it for him, and yet he was named a Champion. He told the Heads of the three schools, the other Champions, Professors Snape and McGonagall and Barty Crouch and Ludo Bagman from the Ministry that he did not want to compete, but was told he had to.

"That's rubbish!" Amelia said.

"Mr. Crouch said it was a magically binding contract," Hermione replied with a slight smirk. "Since no one told him otherwise, he reluctantly agreed."

"Still! He's underage! Even if he had put his name in the Goblet, it could not form a magically binding contract! The magic and law only recognize one such contract an underage witch or wizard can consent to and that one's not it! The only way he could be made to compete is if his Magical Guardian consented on his behalf!"

"Indeed," Hermione drawled. "At first, we believed his reluctant acceptance was enough. But we later – as in within the last couple of days – learned that we were mistaken. He's in the tournament only because his Magical Guardian consented on his behalf."

"Who?" Sirius asked.

"I'll give you a hint," Hermione said. "It had to be someone in that room at the time."

"Dumbledore!"

"Right in one," Hermione said. "We confirmed that at Gringotts yesterday. He's been acting as Harry's Magical Guardian since November 1st, 1981 and is recorded as such with the bank."

"Was he designated as such?" Amelia asked.

Hermione shook her head. "Not by Harry's parents and there's no Will – or at least no one's tried to execute a Will."

"But there is one!" Sirius protested. "I was designated as Executor! There's a copy in my vault and I know James and Lily designated backups given the times!"

"No Will has been submitted to Gringotts, the Ministry or the Wizengamot," Hermione said. "It is possible that, like you, any others may have been unable to do so for one reason or another. It is also possible they were prevented from doing so, although we doubt that was the case as, while someone might prevent them from filing with the Ministry and Wizengamot, doing so with the Goblins is another matter. It is also possible that one or more of the backups chose not to. We can't say. Not without seeing the Will itself and knowing its contents." She glared at Sirius.

"Aside from witnessing the signing and knowing I was named executor, I don't know the contents," Sirius said. "There's a copy in my vault that was magically sealed as per custom. I could not know the contents until I presented it for filing. As Harry's Godfather, I wouldn't be surprised if I had been named as his Magical Guardian. Naturally, given my past and current legal status, I can neither access the Will, nor fully act in that capacity."

"You did sign my Hogsmeade permission slip," Harry offered.

"Which suggests that you are or should be Harry's Magical Guardian and Dumbledore knows it," Hermione added. "It suggests that but does not prove it."

"Why would he do that?" Rose Granger asked. "Why would he become Harry's Magical Guardian? How could he?"

"As for the how," Hermione said, "as there was no Will filed and Harry had no immediate magical relations, he was technically an orphan in the magical world and a Ward of the Wizengamot. As Chief Warlock, he had the authority to assign Harry a Magical Guardian. As for the why... The why begins with a prophecy made just a few months or so before Harry and Neville were born."

As the main courses were served, Hermione told them the prophecy and all the possible interpretations. She also told them that it was probable that Voldemort at least was aware of the first part of it and Dumbledore knew it all as it had been made to him. Finally, she told them what they thought Dumbledore believed it meant; that Harry

was the One destined to defeat Voldemort but that he was destined to die.

"Obviously," she said having thoroughly explained what it could and could not mean, "he is mistaken."

"And what makes you think he believes that Harry must die?" Sirius asked.

"Several things, most of which we've gone over. Ask yourself this: if Harry is the One, why is he denied the training he might need to succeed? Do you really think getting no better than any other student his age will prepare him? Voldemort has already made two attempts at a return since Harry started school. Is it safe to assume Voldemort will wait long enough for Harry to reach a sufficient level of skill on his own? For whatever reason – and the evidence supports both benign, mistaken reasons and malicious ones – Dumbledore has done nothing to prepare Harry for what lies ahead, assuming the One is Harry. Dumbledore's done even less for Neville who might also be the One. While we believe it is probable that Harry is the One following Voldemort's failed attack on him as a baby, unlike Dumbledore we are not betting everything on that assumption."

"Still," Robert Granger noted, "nothing you've said leads to the conclusion that Dumbledore believes the One has to die."

Hermione nodded. "That is true. But this leads to that conclusion." Images of the betrothal contract between the Weasleys and Harry's Magical Guardian for the marriage between Ginny and Harry appeared about the room so that everyone could see them clearly.

"That bastard!" Sirius growled.

"What?" Robert asked. "Surely that's not enforceable."

"It is absolute between the signatories," Sirius said. "They agreed that Harry must marry Ginny by his sixteenth birthday! As both of them will still be minors, they can't refuse! The contract further suggests that Ginny will be pregnant as soon as possible and as often as possible until a healthy Heir to House Potter is born. I've only read about these things. Near as I can recall, there hasn't been one in ages, but they are legal! The only reason you'd use one is to

continue a line when you believe the bridegroom does not have long to live for some reason!"

"He's correct," Amelia added. "There's no way out of it."

"Why have we done this?" Harry asked rhetorically, "Hopefully you are beginning to see that when it comes to me in particular, but also Neville and maybe even all of us, Dumbledore cannot be trusted. We add to it that he's Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot and a very powerful, one man political party in and of himself and the options for regaining even some control of my life are very limited."

"I don't know," Remus began.

"Moony," Sirius said, "I believe him."

"You would," Remus began. "He could have done something about you either before or after you escaped and has not. But I don't see him as trying to control Harry."

"Oh?" Harry said. "So Dumbledore has told you why he's done what we know he's done?"

"Um ... no, not really," Remus said. "I asked about your life before I met you and he assured me it was fine."

"If by being beaten, starved, used as a slave and robbed is fine," Hermione said, "then he was right! The Dursleys received a thousand pounds a month from Harry's vault per Dumbledore's instructions. Did Harry receive any benefit? He slept in a cupboard under a stair for ten years! He never had new clothes before or was ever taken shopping! He never received a gift or present from anyone! He has no memory of a kind word, a hug, a kiss or anything prior to coming to Hogwarts! He now has a tiny bedroom at that place, but it has several locks on the door, bars on the window – or at least it had bars at one point – and a cat flap on the door to pass food to him! If that's Dumbledore's definition of fine, I'd really like to see what he thinks was worse short of Azkaban itself! As Harry's magical guardian, by law he was to take a personal interest in Harry's upbringing and to make sure Harry was being properly cared for! There is nothing that suggests he did anything of the sort since dropping Harry off at that hell hole!"

"Dumbledore has told me next to nothing," Harry said. "I never even heard of him until I got my Hogwarts letter. I never knew about magic before then. He has told me that he believes Voldemort somehow survived that night and is trying to come back, although that was after I figured that out on my own. He told me he thinks my mother's sacrifice might have had something to do with what happened that night and that he believes that sacrifice protects me which is why he insists on my returning to the Dursleys even though he knows I'd rather never go back again. He thinks I have some kind of connection to Voldemort which explains my ability to talk to snakes – which we now know is a bunch of bunk as that ability is a Potter trait.

"But the prophecy? He hasn't even mentioned there might be one, much less what it is! He allows me to spend time with the Weasleys, but has never mentioned my betrothal to Ginny – and neither have her parents! If my life is in such danger, don't you think I should be learning how to protect myself? Muggles would do that for their kids – well, excluding my relatives. He has utterly failed me as my Guardian and I doubt he has any excuse!"

"Dumbledore's always been..." Remus began but stopped. There was now doubt in his voice.

"Been what?" Harry said. "Open? Forthcoming with any relevant information? My parents were placed under the fidelius charm – as were Neville's within days of Neville's and my birth; before the announcement was made in the Daily Prophet. Did he tell you why?"

"He said Voldemort was targeting your parents," Remus said and Sirius nodded.

"Nothing about me, right?"

"No," Sirius said. "It did make sense though. Your parents had been a pain in his arse."

"And yet you were named my Godfather the day I was born," Harry continued. "By custom that meant that you would most likely act as my Magical Guardian if my parents died. My Grandfather was still alive but was already in failing health so we don't think he would have been available. Dumbledore did know that, didn't he?"

"He did," Sirius agreed.

"Does anyone think it appropriate for him to withhold information about a threat to me from the person most likely to be in charge of me should anything happen to my parents? We don't even know if my parents knew for certain!"

"Assuming you're correct," Remus said.

"We have all of this well documented," Hermione replied. "We have a convincing paper trail! We have records from the Ministry of Magic, Gringotts and even Dumbledore's private files; certifications, family journals from four Ancient and Noble Houses and the trial transcript from the Lestrangle Trial and more! We can trace everything almost by the day from the day of the Prophecy to today!"

"The Prophecy was made in June of 1980. The Potters and Longbottoms were placed under the Fidelius Charms in the first week of August, just after Harry and Neville was born and Dumbledore cast both of the Charms. Fabian Prewett was killed on October 28th, 1981 and we know Dumbledore immediately had the Longbottom Secret Keeper changed to another Order member – who happened to be a Death Eater spy and then recommended a similar change with the Potters and another Death Eater spy became Secret Keeper. The Potters were murdered within forty-eight hours of that recommendation! We know from testimony that Voldemort was after BOTH families that night. The Longbottoms were spared only because of what happened at the Potters.

"We know that Dumbledore assumed the duties as Harry's magical guardian first thing the next morning: November 1st 1981. His papers are on file with the Ministry! This was before Sirius was even arrested! He didn't even wait to see if there was a Will! Even if there wasn't, Sirius was not the only person with a superior claim to Dumbledore to act as Harry's Magical Guardian. Two of those with superior claims later challenged him and he denied their claims outright and then had the Wizengamot declare Harry a legal orphan and his charge! All of this is documented and we have the records! As for what happened after, we have the witnesses!"

"Where did you get those?" Amelia asked.

"The journals from the personal elves of the Heirs," Hermione said. "Admittedly, we only got the Longbottom and Potter Journals yesterday. Some of our friends got the Ministry documents just after Christmas. As for Dumbledore's records..."

"You think you Marauders are the only lot capable of being sneaky?" Harry asked. "Ginny nicked them from Dumbledore's office ages ago!"

"I'm sure there's a reasonable explanation," Remus said weakly.

"Is there?" Hermione returned. "I'd love to hear it!"

"And I doubt Dumbledore is going to tell us what he's on about just 'cause we ask," Harry said. "Been asking him since First Year and he either avoids the question altogether or says that he may tell me when I'm older – probably when it's too late. No one has provided a reasonable explanation for any of this except that Dumbledore believes that bloody prophecy and believes I have to be some kind of martyr. I need not tell you that a martyr does not have much in the way of prospects. You add to it he's too bloody powerful and well entrenched and we can't even hope to resolve this through ordinary channels."

"So what are we going to do?" Rose Granger asked.

"Wrong tense," Hermione said. "We've already done it. Dumbledore's out of the picture and won't get back in unless he tells us everything from this day forward!"

"What have you done?"

"You're just kids!" Remus added.

"Don't worry," Hermione smiled. "Our solution to all of this, while quite unorthodox, was quite legal."

A/N: Yes! Yes! I know! The BIG REVEAL hasn't happened yet! (And some of this is repetitive). NEXT CHAPTER! (and I can say that 'cause I'm already on Chapter 29, and all Chapter 19 needs is a final edit). I needed to truly introduce House Longbottom at one point and this seemed logical. I always saw Augusta as somewhat of a forceful personality, but one who did care about her Grandson deeply. I

believe that had Neville actually been a Squib, she would not have kicked him to the curb. I also saw her as very independent, and not a blind toadie. In OotP, she believes Dumbledore about Voldemort and she would here. But there's a difference between believes and believes in.

Hermione's strategy should seem obvious. She wants to develop deep sympathy for the protagonist (Harry and to a lesser extent Neville) and their supporters before she kicks the adults all in the mouth. She doesn't want her parents to hate her or Harry, although knows damn well they might. But it's hard to hate someone you feel sorry for... at least for long...



FRIDAY, MARCH 31st, 1995 - THE SOUTH WING, POTTER APARTMENTS.

Remus sat there stunned. Most of his life he had nothing but the utmost respect for Albus Dumbledore. The man had given him a chance when no one else in this world would have bothered. He was the leader of the Light. He was the most powerful wizard alive and the most respected as well and nothing until now had ever shaken Remus's opinion. But he had no explanation that explained any of this, at least none that did not question the old wizard's mental faculties, sanity or motives.

"The problems were many," Hermione continued. "Were this the Muggle World, Dumbledore's activities as Harry's Guardian would cause him significant legal and political problems. At best he would lose his positions and probably a substantial fortune. At worst he might well find himself residing in Sirius's old cell.

"But this is not that world. Dumbledore controls the legislature and courts directly and the rest of the government indirectly."

Amelia nodded. "While as head of DMLE I decide if a case can and should go to trial, he decides if it ever does. Same's true for non-criminal matters. If he doesn't want something to see the light of day there's little we can do about it."

"Sounds like a bloody dictator!" Robert said.

"Close enough," Hermione agreed. "There's always the chance that the Wizengamot could vote him out."

"He's too slippery and savvy to allow that to happen," Augusta said. "He knows how to play the various factions against each other too well."

"As I said," Hermione went on, "our options had to be – um – legal yet so out of the ordinary no one could stop us before it was too late.

"The immediate problem is that marriage contract with Ginny. She believes her mother will start moving on that this summer! That contract needed to be voided before the end of this school year."

"But it can't be," Amelia said. "There's no way that I could see!"

"Actually," Hermione smiled, "there is. The contract is not between House Weasley and House Potter. Dumbledore is not House Potter so neither bride nor bridegroom are bound by this unless and until it comes to pass. Were they to become legal adults before they could be forced to marry each other, they can void this contract without penalty."

"I could challenge Dumbledore's guardianship under normal circumstances," Sirius said. "I have standing as his magical Godfather and as the Head of the Ancient and Noble House of Black, given that as things stand now he's the next in line. But my current legal situation..."

"We are aware of that problem," Hermione said. "We're also aware that it's improbable that the Weasleys will emancipate their thirteen year old daughter and I doubt Dumbledore will do us any such favors regarding Harry. That being said, there is a way to end this contract AND get Harry out from under Dumbledore's control – short of killing the Old Man. All that needs to be done is for the two of them to emancipate themselves."

"You must be joking," several voices said in unison.

"How can a child emancipate themselves?" Robert asked. "Don't you need a court to do that?"

"Which Dumbledore controls," Remus added.

"There is a way in theory," Augusta said. "But since the invention of contraceptive potions which all girls in school take starting the day they arrive at school, it's impossible! It takes three months for it to wear off! Until they finish school, they're never three months removed from their last dose!"

"Excuse me?" Rose asked.

"Under our law, if an underage witch gets pregnant, she can emancipate herself by marrying the father of her child. If the father is underage, he is emancipated as well. And if those conditions are met, the parents and magical guardians cannot legally object. They need not even be notified until after the marriage is duly recorded

and legally binding on the couple. You're not suggesting something like that?"

"No," Hermione said.

"Thank Merlin," a voice said.

"There's no need as it has already happened," she finished.

"WHAT?" several voices asked.

"How?"

"Three months! There's no way Madam Pomfrey would let the girl slide on her potion for three months!"

"Time is relative," Hermione said cryptically, although this next explanation was why she had told them all about her Time Turner last year. "When we took over this wing, it was dirty, dusty, unused and full of junk and most certainly looked nothing like it does now. We had to gut it top to bottom and completely remodel. Magic can do amazing things, but it can still take time."

"Months," Augusta nodded.

"Over eleven months to be precise," Hermione smiled. "And that was with fourteen House Elves and eighteen of us students working full time on the renovation."

"But that's impossible!" Robert protested. "I mean even if you began First Year there's no way!"

"From your point of view, two weeks ago this was the abandoned Wing," Hermione said. "For the girls here and downstairs right now, that was three hundred and eighty-eight days ago. For Harry and Neville it was two hundred and eighty-seven days ago."

"Time Compression," Amelia said.

Hermione nodded and then explained what that was and what it meant. "It would give the prospective bride time for the potions to wear off and to conceive a child. It also provided time for research

and training, so don't think this Wing was just a teenage hormonal paradise. It takes time to learn."

"So Harry and Ginny are married?" Rose asked.

Hermione nodded. "But not to each other," she added. "Ginny knew that even if they chose to marry each other, Dumbledore would still have his hooks in Harry. She had to marry another. Fortunately, she's in love with another."

Harry really hoped the elves had put the Calming Draught in their food and that it worked. He knew what was about to come could be ... unsettling and provocative to say the least.

"Now," Harry said carefully, "before we continue, I think we should point out that this solution was not Neville's or my idea. It may seem rash, but we explored every other option before this and tried to find a way to accomplish this short of this solution. But time was against us. We had to end that contract before this summer. We had to end Dumbledore's control before all other options for dealing with the threat were gone. In my opinion, we needed to do this before Voldemort succeeds in returning so that we have a say in how to go forward from there. None of us were forced or pressured into doing this..."

"Um," Neville said, "not that I'm complaining – 'cause I'm not – but I think it's fair to say Harry and I were tricked into it a bit."

"Fair enough," Harry said. "But we did go forward knowingly and having been shown this was both necessary and the only option we could do that Dumbledore could not counter in some way."

"Tricked?" Sirius asked.

"Yeah," Harry said. "We'll get to that."

"And just how did this work?" Robert asked. He suspected Hermione was far more involved than he would have liked. "You get her pregnant and only then agreed to marry?"

"Actually," Harry replied, "she told me what was going on – mostly. Neville and I and they could all agree not to go forward with this. I agreed to marry before anything irreversible happened."

"As did I," Neville said. This was not entirely true as Hermione had not told Harry of the full plan until after she was pregnant. They had decided not to tell the adults this as in the end Harry believed he probably would have gone along with it anyway.

"We were told all of this Wednesday," Harry continued. "We completed the marriages and had them recorded with Gringotts and the Ministry yesterday morning."

"That's impossible," Rose began.

"Time Compression," Harry replied. "We spent one hour your time with our – um – prospective bride, each of whom had already spent more than three months here under Time Compression since their last contraceptive potion. For us that was a full month which, given the fact that we did eventually become intimate with them and they were taking fertility potions pretty much sealed the deal."

"One might say the cart was placed before the horse," Hermione said, "but only by a few days in here and a few hours for the rest of the world. And it was planned, not an accident and it's irreversible."

"You can't be serious," Robert Granger began.

"I'm Sirius," Sirius complained but his joke fell a little flat.

"And if the brides in question are pregnant, they are quite correct," Amelia commented. "Unless they're brother and sister or a similar degree of kinship, the marriage is probably valid and cannot easily be annulled. Divorce is not a realistic option in our world unless the wife is unable to bear children or we're talking abuses of the worst sort and, as this law requires a pregnancy to allow the marriage to go forward, there can be no question of fertility. These are properly recorded?"

Harry nodded. He waived a wand and a stack of papers appeared before Amelia. Amelia spent several minutes reading them. Each time she finished one document it seemingly disappeared. Hermione explained the copies would be available for anyone to see after dinner. "Bloody hell," Amelia said when she finished.

"So they're married?" Sirius asked.

Amelia nodded. "Pursuant to several sections of the Marriage Acts most notably Section 14."

"But the boys are what? Fourteen?" Rose complained. "In our law they can't marry even with their parents' permission before they are sixteen!"

"Our laws are different," Amelia said. "If they are capable of having a child together, they can marry if they do. That was one of the reasons behind the mandatory use of contraceptive potions."

"That and underage marriages were wrecking havoc with Pureblood marriage arrangements," Susan added.

"As far as I know," Amelia continued, "it's been ages since the last time a couple married under Section 14, but that Section is still on the books."

"And that means?" Rose Granger asked.

"The Goblins have verified their claims of right," Amelia said. "They performed a blood test of sorts. It confirms that the wives were virginal before – er – being with their husbands and that there can be no question that they are pregnant and the boys are the fathers of the children and they agree to marry to raise their child together and finally, that upon emancipation, the boys have access to sufficient funds in their vaults to support their families indefinitely."

Robert Granger glared at Harry. He suspected Hermione was involved somehow and hoped it was not this way. Rose glared at her daughter wondering the same thing.

"Sufficient funds," Robert said, "just what does that mean?"

"Harry and Neville are the end of their lines," Hermione said. "They are from families that are known as Ancient and Noble lines. They are scions of magical lines dating back a thousand years or more and also from English nobility. And their families accumulated wealth over the centuries rather than squandered it. They are quite wealthy, Daddy."

"How wealthy?"

"Neville's the pauper of the two," Hermione said with a smirk.

"My total net worth is not quite a billion quid," Neville said.

Robert looked at the young man in shock.

"Harry's well over the billion quid mark," Hermione added.

"That explains this place," Robert began.

"Actually," Hermione replied, "this place explains why a prudent family can amass such a fortune. How much do you think this place cost?"

"A fair bit," Robert said. "Few million quid at least..."

"If we spent twenty thousand Galleons, I'd be shocked," Hermione replied. "Most of this place was finished before yesterday which was the first day any of us did any shopping."

"Actually, it was less than that," Susan said, "unless you factor in the books and entertainment system we got. That bit cost about 14,000 Galleons."

"You did this all for less than a hundred thousand?" Robert said in disbelief. "How?"

"Magic," Hermione said. "Some transfiguration, some conjuration and some warding and such and here we are. Aside from land, the actual building structures and certain magical items or potions, most of the magical economy pays for services more so than products. Clothes and fancy cloth are services mostly. Just about anyone with enough training can make the basics, but for stylish patterns and such, you need to be trained even more. You may notice the curtains, upholstery and bedding in this Wing, while nice, is not very fancy..."

"Robert! Hermione!" Rose began. "What has any of this to do with anything? Hermione? Stop beating 'round the bush. Answer me directly 'cause this dance of yours is beginning to annoy. Under the bizarre magical laws, are you Harry's wife or aren't you?"

"Yes," Hermione said.

"Yes? Yes you are his wife or yes you are not?"

"Yes," Hermione repeated. "Yes, this all was my idea after we could find no other way to help Harry. Yes, I was and am in love with him and he is in love with me. Yes, I told him about this before he was intimate with me and not after. Yes, I am pregnant with his child. And yes, we are now married and legally adults."

"NOT IN OUR WORLD," Robert began and he stood pushing his chair back. Then he sat suddenly and much to his own surprise and was immediately bound to the chair by ropes. Everyone looked around and saw that Harry had a wand pointed at Mr. Granger. He had not even said a word.

"Bloody Hell!" Nymphadora Tonks exclaimed. "How did you do that?"

Harry shrugged. "We told you that Time Compression was used for training as well." Harry looked at Mr. Granger. "I had hoped that would have been unnecessary, but I also was not about to not be prepared for something like that."

"And if he hadn't done it, Daddy, I would have," Hermione added.

Rose Granger's jaw had dropped open at first, but she was regaining her composure and looked at her daughter. "Your father's right," Rose said as calmly as she could. "You may be an adult witch, but in our world you are not. And, in our world you cannot be married! And yet ... and yet ... you should have known that! Now you're pregnant at fifteen..."

"Sixteen," Hermione countered.

"Excuse me? I'm your mother! I think I know when you were born!"

Hermione nodded. "Temporally, I've lived sixteen years and more. I'll be eighteen by the time this school year is over, or almost eighteen at any rate."

"So why this?" Robert growled more at Harry than anyone else. "If you can get older with that Time Machine thing, why marry?"



"Because legally I'm still fifteen in this world. The law was designed to prevent a child from becoming an adult that way."

"Which means you're still a child in our world and we can annul the marriage and deal with your child..." Robert began.

"You are NOT about to suggest an abortion!" Rose cut him off.

"Er ... um ... no. Adoption?"

"Unfortunately," Amelia said, "while she may be too young to marry in your world, she's not too young in ours and your world will recognize her marriage and emancipation as being valid. That recognition is based upon a long standing Treaty between the magical world and British Crown. If she was French, you might be right given that they lopped their last Treaty Bound King's head off, although I believe the French Muggles honor their treaty despite that. England never did that. It's a magical treaty so as of yesterday Muggle Britain will recognize your daughter as Lady Potter and as a legal adult in most respects."

"Most respects?" Robert and Rose asked together.

Hermione nodded. "Aside from marriage, any rights that are age specific remain. I can't get my driving license until after my real seventeenth birthday for example."

Rose glared at her daughter for a moment. "Well then. Since you are an adult, you can understand why your father and I wish to leave now."

Hermione nodded. "I can understand, but I would be disappointed with you if you could leave and did."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Robert asked.

"The security wards on this wing are exceedingly complex," Hermione said. "Most significantly, there's a fidelius ward on the whole place. If you could leave now and if we refused to let you know about us, you would have no memory of any of this. Unless and until our Secret Keeper is authorized to key you in, you cannot leave here and retain memories of this place or anything you

learned or experienced while here. We believe it would have been inefficient to have our Secret Keeper meet every guest and bring them to us and we're not certain we could have done that at all for our Muggle Guests. Everyone is arriving by special passes through our floo, special portkey or by elf. The only door in is sealed and will remain sealed until the current security ward sequence is complete, which will be at ten in the morning the day after tomorrow – for the rest of the world. Basically, there's no way out unless you're an elf for now and once Time Compression activates, no way out at all."

"You're going to activate Time Compression," Remus asked.

Hermione nodded. "Actually, the warding sequence has been activated. I can't stop it even if I wanted to. There were four of us who placed the Runes for the wards and none of us know where the others' runes were placed. The only way to stop the sequence is to deactivate every rune in the place and no one can find a rune except the person who placed it.

"That being said, Time Compression will activate at about ten tomorrow morning. Between now and the end of the sequence, we will experience fifteen months under Compression. At the end of that time, my child will be six to seven months old."

"You know what I am!" Remus protested. "You can't have me here for fifteen months."

"Don't be silly," Hermione smiled. "Your transformation is tied to the full moon. There won't be one. Our fifteen months ends April 2nd and the next full moon will still be almost a month away."

"Fifteen months?" Remus said in almost awe. "Fifteen months without becoming the beast?"

"Yes Professor," Hermione began. "And it's closer to sixteen months as the next full moon is not until the 29th. You did transform the day before yesterday, yes?"

"Yes, and I'm no longer your professor," Remus replied.

"Don't be so sure about that," she smiled back.

"So we're your prisoners for that time," Robert began.

"I guess that's a pessimistic way of seeing it," Hermione smiled. "Then again, by that definition we all are as none of us can leave until the warding sequence runs its course. It is a safeguard we included. Trying to cross an active time compression ward is suicidal, and from a defensive standpoint limiting ingress and egress in times of vulnerability is prudent. Our understanding of what happened to the Potters and Longbottoms in 1981 led us to the conclusion that the failures were largely due to over-reliance upon a single warding scheme, one which those under the ward could neither limit nor control."

"But it's not like that now," Andy Tonks said.

"We believe Voldemort is trying to come back," Hermione said. "We're pretty certain of that. We do not know for certain, but Harry's involuntary participation in this tournament is highly suspect. We don't believe his inclusion was Dumbledore's doing, but the man made him compete once his name did come out of that Cup. Someone is trying to do something and whatever it is, it's not in Harry's best interests. Add in the very real prospect of an involuntary marriage and we can't say Harry's at no risk. All of us involved are here by our own choice because we believe that Harry and Neville may be important and the so called adults with the knowledge and position to do the right thing by them have and are continuing to fail them."

"I," Augusta Longbottom began.

"You knew nothing of the prophecy or that it could mean your son as well as Harry, did you?"

"N-no."

"You should have! At the very least Dumbledore should have told you! Then again, we wonder whether he ever told anyone! Don't you think this information's important? Would you have done things differently regarding Neville had you been aware?"

Augusta nodded.

"Dumbledore's been keeping valuable and critical information to himself for years! He may even have gone so far as to suppress the

Potter Will in order to keep Harry under his control, although that is a conclusion and not a verifiable fact at this point. Harry, Neville and their families needed this information and were denied it for whatever reason and as a result, as this crisis approaches they are unprepared and – whether Dumbledore intended this or not – they are set up for failure! If that prophecy is true – and we're not saying it is – failure is not an option. Even if it's not true, two scary powerful wizards think it is and that too means Harry and Neville must be prepared. As we discussed, they have not been and there's reason to believe they won't be. The only way to change these things is to take Dumbledore out of his position of control and the only way we could find to do that without his being able to stop us is the way we've taken. When he returns to school on Monday, the marriages will be unassailable and we wives can remain in school since our children will be too old to send us or them away."

"Basically," Susan said, "this is planned to be legally and politically irreversible. That's part of the reason why you all are here."

"Oh?" Robert asked.

"We could have avoided telling you, Daddy," Hermione said. "You'd've receive notification of my marriage, emancipation and the birth of your grandchild sometime next week and we could have avoided the – um – discomfort of ... well... But that's not right, is it? We did not invite Harry's Muggle relations 'cause they don't care. But you do care about me and I could not exclude you and ... and ... This way, we can build our family, don't you see? You won't miss anything outside and yet we'll be together for the next fifteen months. I feel like we've been drifting apart in a way and I don't like it. True, I'm not your little girl anymore, but I'm still your daughter and you're still my parents and I still love you and want your love. You'll be here through most of my pregnancy and for the first months of your grandchild's life. We intend to continue our training and classes while we're here and you will be allowed to at least observe them whenever you like. You always complained about how the secrecy laws prevent you from seeing what I've learned. Those law don't apply here."

Rose could not say anything.

"That explains us," Robert began.

"Sirius is Harry's Godfather who's missed most of Harry's life," Hermione responded. "Remus was best of friends with his parents and we only know him because he was our professor last year. The Tonks are Harry's closest magical cousins – other than Sirius - whom he's never met."

"And who are also decent people," Sirius said, "unlike the rest of Andy's family ... no offense Andy."

"None taken, Siri," Andromeda replied.

Robert looked at Harry.

"Mrs. Tonks's older sister is Bellatrix Lestrange," Harry said, "a Death Eater rotting in Azkaban for the attack on Neville's parents. Her younger sister is Narcissa Malfoy, mother of Draco Malfoy..."

"Say no more," Robert said. "Hermione has told us about that little cretin. There's a reason why tigers eat their young. The others? I mean this Ginny Weasley's not here..."

"She's downstairs with her father and oldest brother," Hermione said.

"And she's my Hermione," Neville said. "She's my wife and is carrying our child."

"What about the other young ladies?" Robert asked. "Something tells me they and theirs are not here for the conversation."

Neville chuckled. "Now we get to the bit where Hermione and Ginny tricked us!"

"Excuse me?" Augusta asked.

"You are aware of the Line Continuation Contract between House Bones and House Longbottom," Neville began. After Augusta nodded, Neville explained to the others what that was.

"So you broke an arranged marriage?" Robert asked. "I swear this world is ... out of date!"

"Actually no," Neville said. "While what we did had that effect in other cases, that's not what we did here. After Ginny and I signed

our Marriage Contract, she then told me to honor my family's commitment to House Bones. Basically, she told me to make Susan my second wife."

"Bigamy?" Rose asked. "Is that legal?"

"It's exceedingly rare," Augusta said. "My Neville might be the only case in Britain right now, but it's not illegal."

"It is in our world!" Robert said.

"Is it really?" Marilyn Abbott asked. "I'm a Muggle Born. As you should know, my parents divorced when I was a child and remarried. How's that so different?"

"It is!"

"I really don't see how," Susan said. "You have to understand magical contracts are very, very difficult to break which is why divorce is so rare in the magical world. Muggles divorce and remarry quite frequently. They also engage in extra-marital affairs and in some cases those affairs are exclusive – as in the paramours don't have other paramours. That's legal, but how is it truly different? I take it, Harry, you have honored your family's commitment to House Abbott?"

"You know I have," Harry said. "I probably would not have had Hermione not told me to."

"Whipped!" Sirius said with a cough and then laughed.

"So you had to take a second wife?" Rose asked.

"Didn't have to," Harry said.

"That contract was a contingency when we signed it," Marilyn Abbott said. "I don't think any of us thought it would come to pass. I know we all hoped it wouldn't. But the Death Eaters murdered my husband before we could have another child. Hannah is the last of her line. House Abbott controls several votes in the Wizengamot and those votes would pass to a Pureblood line unless House Abbott continues. Hannah is not Mrs. Potter. She's Lady Abbott and their children will be Abbotts and not Potters. Few wizards would take a

back seat in such matters, unless they had no reason to be in charge. As Head of his own Ancient and Noble House, once his line is secure, Harry would have no reason to take over House Abbott. With this, both lines are going to continue and House Abbott remains under House Abbott's control."

"Makes it sound like Harry's little more than breeding stock," Rose grumbled.

"A fair if inaccurate analogy," Amelia replied. "Susan and Hannah needed husbands who would stay out of their family's affairs as it were. This is not to say Harry and Neville will not have any input, but they can't expect control over those Houses or their assets. As they have their own Houses to look to, this arrangement can work and should when one considers the Houses were already allied. But that presents another problem: the Plural Marriage Laws."

"What's that?" Rose asked.

Amelia explained that as well.

"A harem?" Rose asked. "You're part of a harem?"

"Harem implies submissiveness and subservience," Hermione said. "That's not our situation at all."

"Do you really think you raised your daughter to be submissive?" Harry asked.

"So you have more than two wives?" Rose asked. "You had to do this?"

"Had to? No," Harry replied. "As I understand it I did not have to take another wife after Hermione nor after Hannah. But once I agreed to honor my family commitment to Hannah – at Hermione's insistence I might add – I could have been forced to take the additional wives."

"Which would have given Dumbledore an in," Hermione said. "And the Pureblood bigots would have insisted on having one of their daughters becoming one of Harry's wives. The same is true for Neville as House Longbottom is about as politically powerful as House Potter, which is to say more powerful than most of the others in the Wizengamot based upon their votes alone. By triggering the

Plural Marriage laws, House Potter and Longbottom – and by extension House Abbott and Bones – become a political plum of immense importance to the various factions all of whom would want their people in the mix. That could only be prevented if the positions were already filled."

"This was a political maneuver start to finish," Lisa Turpin said speaking for the first time. "To get Harry and Neville out from under Dumbledore's control, we had to close all avenues of control and that included political ones."

"You're part of this?" her mother Cynthia asked.

Lisa nodded. "Technically, I'm Neville's Third Wife and fill the Half-Blood requirement of the Plural Marriage Law. This was my choice, Mother. I had eleven months or more to decide to go forward with this and I did think about it long and hard. Each one of us are doing this by choice. We all believe Harry and Neville are too important to be kept in the dark and under any one person's thumb. But all of us have our own reasons as well. Neville is one of my closest friends and I think he's dashing, so that bit was easy. But there's also that marriage contract out there, one which I never wanted to see go forward. This ends that. For many of us, it was those damnable contracts. For Muggle Borns like Hermione, it was the lack of any real career prospects unless she married well – and marrying into an Ancient and Noble House is as well as any girl can marry. Course it helps that they are in love..."

"We all chose this," Susan began.

"Um ... speak for yourself," Neville teased. "While Ginny and Hermione were up front about the need to get married and Harry and I accepted that before anything happened, they left out the rest of this until after they were pregnant. I understood that I probably would have to take Susan as my Second Wife. I knew it was unlikely she would find a suitable wizard who would stand aside when it came to his own family and House Bones. I also knew that it might trigger this. But it wasn't until after it was too late with Ginny that she confirmed the existence of a Line Continuation Contract."

"Same here," Harry agreed. "I think I speak for Neville as well when I say that I would have been perfectly content if it were just Hermione and me. But the deck was stacked against us what with the Line



Contracts and what they would trigger. Hermione's plan reshuffled the cards in our favor."

"So you have four wives then?" Sirius asked. "You do realize all of this is a prank of historic proportions, don't you?"

"I hadn't looked at it that way," Harry admitted. "Then again, this was not my idea."

"As we have no intention of backing down or taking it back," Hermione began, "I'm not sure you can really call this a prank."

Sirius shrugged. "It's gonna piss a lot of people off and there's nothing they can do about it. It's also totally unexpected. You do know, Harry, that your Mum would probably take issue..."

"She signed the Line Contract," Harry said. "I doubt she was unaware of what that might mean."

Sirius shrugged. "She probably hoped it would never come to that."

"We all did," Marilyn Abbott said. "But we all knew what it could mean."

"I would like to note that Hermione is a Muggle Born," Harry said, "and bloody brilliant and this was her plan."

"You came up with this?" Robert asked.

Hermione shook her head. "One of our Pureblood members did. We looked for any other way to get Harry's life back, anything but this and came up empty. I love him, Daddy, and I don't want him to live his life as someone else's puppet!"

"So he's your puppet, then?"

"Most certainly not!"

"I don't mind being her puppet," Harry said. "At least she has my interests at heart."

"Whipped!" Sirius coughed.

"So just how many 'wives' are we talking about?" Rose asked.

"And who are they?" Sirius added.

"There were eighteen of us girls helping with this stuff," Hannah said. "Hermione was and is our leader of sorts. When this came up, we all had the choice to come in as either Harry or Neville's wife or not and if we chose not to, we were still a part of this team, so to speak. With Time Compression we all had ages to decide and it was a big decision as if we chose to go forward it meant we'd be married and have children in very short order and probably be committed to this course for life. I don't think any of us thought all of us would go all the way in..."

"All of you did?" Rose asked.

Hermione and the other girls nodded.

Neville pulled out his new wand and gave waived it. Four picture frames appeared on the walls positioned so that everyone could easily see at least one of them. Augusta beamed at this display of magic. With another waive, a picture appeared of a red haired young woman, one who was not in the room.

"This is Ginny Weasley," Neville said. "I love her. We've been officially dating since the Yule Ball and unofficially since the first Hogsmeade Weekend. She's a Third Year Gryffindor, second in her class. She's thirteen and a half by calendar and a year older with Time Compression. She's my First Wife."

"You all have met my First Wife," Harry said, "who was the first person who was ever nice to me and not named Hagrid. For those who don't know, she's a Fourth Year Gryffindor and at the top of our Year."

"My Second Wife," Neville said, "is Susan here. We've been friends since First Year. She's a Fourth Year Hufflepuff and third in our class."

"Hannah's my Second Wife," Harry said. "Didn't really know her well 'til very recently, but I know she's one of the few who's been on my side all along even if it was in the distance. She's Susan's best friend and also a Fourth Year Hufflepuff. Seventh in our year?"

Hannah nodded.

"Lisa's my Third Wife," Neville said. "She's a Half-Blood Ravenclaw and is just ahead of Hannah in our Year. I've been friends with her since Second Year."

Harry waived his wand and a new picture appeared in the Frame. "This is my Third Wife Katie Bell. She's a Fifth Year Gryffindor. She's Muggle Born, second in her class and she and I are on our House Team. We started on the team the same year."

Neville changed the picture again. "My Fourth Wife," he said. "She's Laura Caldwell, a fifth year Muggle Born Ravenclaw. She's top of her class and a Prefect."

The picture changed again. "My Fourth Wife," Harry said, "Luna Lovegood. She's a Pureblood Ravenclaw and at the top of Third Year."

There was a new picture. "Parvati Patil, my Fifth Wife. She's a Half-Blood Gryff and is eighth in our class."

The picture seemed to change.

"Isn't that the same girl?" Sirius asked.

"No," Harry said. "that's her twin sister Padma. She's my Fifth Wife and second in our year behind Hermione."

There was a new picture. "My Sixth Wife Angela Lee," Neville said. "She's Muggle Born and a Third Year Puff. She's third in her class."

"Marcia Robbins," Harry said when the next picture appeared. "She's Fifth year in Hufflepuff, fourth in her class and a Prefect. She's also a Muggle Born."

"Tracey Davis," Neville said. "Pureblood Fourth Year Slytherin. She's also ninth in our year."

"Daphne Greengrass," Harry continued. "Also a Pureblood, fourth year Slytherin. She's third in our class."

"Lucinda Urquhart," Neville said. "Fifth Year Slytherin Prefect. She ranks third in that year."

"Rosie Rosier," Harry said. "She's a Third Year Slytherin and fourth in her class."

"My final wife is Michelle Marcella," Neville said. "She's an Italian Muggle Born who was adopted by an Italian magical couple when she was young. She's a Fourth Year at Beauxbatons in France and is at the top of her class. She's here for the Tournament."

"And last but not least," Harry continued, "Gabrielle Delacour. She's at the top of her Third Year class at Beauxbatons and is the younger sister of the Beauxbatons' Tri-Wizard Champion Fleur Delacour. She's Veela and I saved her life during the Second Task."

"And she also happens to be the daughter of the Deputy Minister of Magic of France," Amelia added. "And Michelle's father is my counterpart across the Channel in Italy."

"An added bonus," Hermione said.

"Oh?" Robert asked.

"If anyone moves against House Potter or House Longbottom, such a move would provoke an international incident," Hermione replied.

"Politics!"

"The Ancient and Noble Houses are not unlike your nobility," Amelia said. "When it concerns them, it is political unfortunately."

"Nine extremely good looking and smart young ladies," Sirius laughed. "Don't know whether I should be jealous of you or feel sorry for you, Harry."

"We like to think we cornered the market on looks and brains," Neville commented.

"I still don't see how this is not a Harem," Rose began.

"Cause Neville and I can't control them unless they want us to," Harry said. "You really think we can do that with nine of the smartest and most capable witches of our age? Like that would work!"

"And I have Ginny Weasley," Neville said. "She's probably more devious than the Twins!"

"Our generations Marauders," Harry explained to Sirius. "Hannah has final say over House Abbott matters. While I may have final say over House Potter, do you really think Hermione and the others will let me do whatever I want?"

"And just how does this Plural relationship work?" Rose asked.

"We're still working on that," Hermione admitted.

"But we'll make it work," Hannah added.

"And the other girls," Rose said, "where are they now?"

"The others are downstairs enjoying dinner with their parents and the other guest who have arrived so far," Hermione said.

"And they're being told this as well?"

Hermione shook her head. "Maybe. Not like this. We are going to tell all the guests tomorrow morning once Time Compression is active."

"So why are we being told?"

"You're being told because you're my parents and this whole think is mostly my fault in a way. You're also health care professionals which will become important in a few months and you're also Muggles. It is our considered opinion Muggle parents should not be excluded from this world.

"Mrs. Longbottom is here 'cause she's Neville's gran and Magical Guardian. She also holds the House Longbottom proxy on the Wizengamot which may become important going forward considering that even though Neville is legally an adult, he still must be twenty-one by date of birth to assume his House Seat. Hannah's mum is here 'cause of the Line Contract as is Madam Bones. But

Madam Bones is also here 'cause she's head of DMLE. She can verify the legal documents..."

"Already have," Amelia said. "They are either the best forgeries in history or our girls are indeed pregnant and married to these two young men. Given that you can't fake the Gringotts documents, the girls are married and emancipated and no, I am not happy with that but will have to accept it."

"She's held the Bones proxy," Hermione continued. "She might also help us restore another Ancient and Noble House, namely House Black. Sirius is head of that house and we hope this –er – get together will at least begin a process that might lead to his exoneration."

"Thanks," Sirius said.

"Sirius is here because although Dumbledore is Harry's Magical Guardian, Sirius should be and Harry trusts him."

"Unless pranks are involved," Harry added.

"Professor Lupin is here for several reasons," Hermione continued. "First of all, he's the best Defense teacher we've had and we hope he'll continue in that capacity while we're here. Our current professor is..."

"Anti-social," Hannah said, "grumpy and scary."

"Professor Lupin was also a close, personal friend of Harry's parents and was the easiest way to get Sirius here. The Tonks family is here because they are Harry and Sirius's relatives but also because Mr. Tonks is a Healer, Mrs. Tonks a Potions Mistress and their daughter an Auror, all of which will be useful either for our training or ... well our pregnancies. That's also why the Turpins are here as Mr. Turpin is also a Healer and Mrs. Turpin a Healing Assistant – I guess that's kind of like a nurse," Hermione added for her parents. "We're also going to ask Mr. Tonks and Mr. Turpin to verify that we are in fact expecting."

It took all of four minutes for the two healers to conduct their examinations and verify that the four young women were expecting. They were all between two and three weeks along. It was still too

early to determine anything else such as the baby's sex or magical status, or even whether there was only one of them. Mr. Tonks explained that there was a higher incidence of fraternal (non-identical) twins where witches were using fertility potions.

FRIDAY, MARCH 31st, 1995 - THE SOUTH WING.

Robert Granger was as close to furious as he ever had been in his life. He paced back and forth across the room he was now stuck in for over a year and more as his home. He had so wanted to throttle Harry Potter! True, Harry had been his daughter's best friend. But Hermione was his little girl! Okay, it was true she had boobs now, she was becoming a young woman. But Hermione was his child.

He looked over at his wife Rose. She was sitting in the bed in their Guest Room pretending to read her book. He knew she was also upset by this! Their little girl, all but fifteen years old by their count, was married and pregnant! He knew his wife was upset by this. She had not turned a single page. And he had been watching! This was her way of not appearing upset and had been for many years. But he knew her and she knew him. He knew that she knew he too was upset.

Robert Granger had been born in 1952 in Portsmouth England, coincidentally on the same day as the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, a point his mother would bring up from time to time either in jest or when she was particularly annoyed with him. His parents had scrimped and saved and purchased their very first telly and, while neither became fans of the medium, Robert's mother was looking forward to watching the coronation. Little Bobby Granger had different plans for that day. "Bobby Granger! Just because you've always felt your more important that Her Majesty the Queen does not mean that..." was one of his Mum's usual introductions to a disciplinary lecture.

Robert's father Michael Granger was a career navy man. He enlisted at the age of 16 in 1939 several months before the war broke out. He spent the entire war assigned to the same destroyer beginning as an unrated deck seaman. His ship had been part of the hunt for the German Battleship Bismark in 1941 and participated in three invasions specifically North Africa, Sicily and off Sword Beach as part of the vast armada that invaded Normandy France in 1944. Most of his father's war service, however, was spent on convoy escort trying to protect the slow yet vital merchant ships from German submarines. He said he preferred the North Atlantic convoys even though the U-boats were seemingly plentiful. The one Murmansk Convoy was a nightmare. While there were far fewer U-boats, the convoy was almost always in range of the German



surface fleet and Luftwaffe and it was one of the few times as a sailor that he and his mates prayed for perpetual fog. His father used to say that by war's end, his ship had sunk four U-boats, shot down eleven German aircraft and also had blown up a camel in Africa, a wine barrel in Sicily and an ox cart on Sword Beach.

By the time Robert was born, his father was a Warrant Officer. The pay, while far better than that of an ordinary seaman, was not all that great. Robert's parents were always very frugal people mainly because they had to be. They still lived in the same three bedroom flat in Portsmouth they had moved to after Robert's sister Anna was born in 1955. Robert was sixteen before they finally bought a small car, although that was mostly because they really did not need one given that they could get anywhere they needed to go either by walking or by public transit. The car was so he and his sister could learn to drive.

Roberts parents were not well educated formally. Each had left school when they were sixteen, which was not uncommon. At sixteen, you sat your exams similar to magical OWLs. If you did not do well enough to advance to the college prep course or if your family lacked the means, your choice was either trade or technical school or the workforce. Michael Granger passed well enough, but left for the Navy because there was little point in Prep School if he and his family could not afford University. His wife Ellen also did well enough but also lacked the means and became a waitress at a pub in Portsmouth that Michael frequented years later which was where they met. While they were not well educated, they were well read. Books were always a part of their home life and their children's. And, while they were unsure if they would be afford to send their two children on to university, they stressed education in their home. Both Robert and his sister Anna went into the prep courses and both did well enough on their A Levels to go on to University, although the money remained and issue.

Robert decided he'd wait. He could always go later. In the meantime, he'd earn and save and allow his parents to worry only about his younger sister. When he finished school, he followed in his father's footsteps and enlisted in the Royal Navy. Unlike his father, he became a sonar operator and submariner. He was ultimately posted to the then brand new atomic powered Hunter/Killer submarine HMS Conqueror and would spend much of his time at sea in the same waters his father had sailed during the nightmarish Murmansk

Convoys, and even further north, under the Arctic ice seeking out and trailing Russian submarines and doing other things he was sure he still could not talk about.

Robert was proud of his naval service. He felt that Conqueror was a "Crack Ship" as was the term and he was lucky to have served in her. Years after he left the service, Conqueror sank the Argentine cruiser General Belgrano, effectively driving the Argentine surface navy back into port and out of the Falklands War altogether. This still came up at family gatherings whenever his dad boasted about the U-boats and such. Robert's boat had done his old Pa one better, driving a whole Navy from the seas. One would think Robert Granger was there, given how proud he was of that feat at the time. But while he was not opposed to a naval career, he still wanted to go on to University and, thanks to his parents, had learned how to stretch and save his pay. His officers wanted him to stay in as, by the time his enlistment was up he was a rated Petty Officer who they felt might well make Warrant sooner rather than later. But he had enough money saved up, he figured, to put him through University so in 1976 he left the Service and entered University three years behind his younger sister Anna.

In Robert's very first class, in English Literature as he recalled, he met Rose Carter although they would not begin dating for another year. Rose was born in 1957. She had an older brother named Daniel. Her father had gone to University and was now a Professor. Her mother had trained as a Nurse. The Carters were better off than the Grangers. She grew up in a small house with a small garden and they always had a car. But it was merely a minor question of degree, really.

Robert would admit he was smitten immediately. Rose would as well. But he was not so bold in romance and she knew he was older so it took some time for them to come together as a couple, although almost no time to do so as friends. But they did start dating and fell in love openly very soon thereafter. After Robert's first year, he earned a scholarship based on his marks as did Rose. They now thought of advanced degrees. By the end of University, they were engaged and had been accepted to Dental School on scholarship. Their plan was to get married after Dental School and start a family once they felt settled enough, but they were planning on a family. When they started Dental School, they moved into a small flat together. Times had changed and society had changed. In their

parents eyes this was almost scandalous, but as the parents agreed with the match and as they were already engaged, there was little real argument given that this sort of thing was common now.

Hermione changed everything. Pessimistically, she wasn't supposed to happen. Rose found out that she was pregnant early in the spring of their first year in dental school. She told Robert. Neither of them thought of not keeping her. But this was not the way they planned it. Hermione was not supposed to come to them until sometime after dental school, but it was clear she had other plans, just as Robert had other plans for the day of the Queen's coronation. It was somewhat distressing having to explain it to their families. But they went forward and changed their plans. They were married by a Justice of the Peace a few weeks after learning of the pregnancy - after all, they were engaged - and had the big wedding for family and friends after Hermione was born, because Rose was not about "to look like a beached white whale" in her wedding dress.

"This is madness!" Robert finally said. "This whole place is a bloody lunatic asylum."

"I'm trying to read, Robert," Rose began.

"No you're not! You haven't turned a single bloody page! And don't deny it, 'cause I've been paying attention! You're as upset as I am!"

Rose put down her book. "Possibly," she said. "Confused and befuddled might also work."

"You're okay with this?"

"No Robert. I am trying to deal with this! This is a different culture, a different legal situation and I have to accept that she is married and part of whatever this Plural Marriage thing is!"

"She's only fifteen..."

"Sixteen," Rose said. "You're the science fiction fan and know more about that temporal stuff. But I agree."

"She's still too young..." Robert began.

"Robert, how old do you have to be to be ready to be a parent?"

"Older than she and that Harry are!"

Rose snorted. "Robert, there are two parts to being a parent as you probably know. The first and hardest is usually the responsibility in providing for the child. You and I know a child means we needed money, and our first few years with Hermione were hard because we were both still in school and wanted to finish so that the rest would fall in place. That's why we wanted to wait! But they don't have that problem at all, do they? Even if you split his fortune between Hermione and the others equally, I'd think that over a hundred million quid makes that problem rather minor. Providing for a child is not a problem for them. Harry could have a thousand children and still provide for them all financially better than we have for Hermione. So in that regard, as disturbing as it all is, I'm not too worried at all.

"But the other part? It's more than providing for them isn't it? It's raising them as well. I'd like to think we did well with Hermione but did we? I don't think anyone is truly ready to be a parent in that regard; not at fifteen and not at fifty, not for the first one at any rate!

"And if what they've said is true, it won't be the same for them as it was for us when we had Hermione. They won't need to drop their child off early in the morning and pick him or her up in the evening five and six days a week, not seeing them at all except briefly at breakfast and just before bed as we had to during Dental School and our first few years of practice. The only time they won't be able to be with the child is when they are actually in class. The Elves will look after the child while their away for a few hours here and there. The one thing we always regretted..."

"We never had enough time with her," Robert said. "Not when she was a baby, not when she was a little girl. When our schedule began to allow for more time, she was in school and then ... then she was here for nine months and more of the year when we couldn't spend any time with her at all."

"Exactly."

"You sound like you're almost willing to accept this!"

"And what else are we going to do, Robert? Their underage marriage law, while it hasn't been applied in two hundred years or so, is still valid. Their Plural Marriage and Line Continuation laws are also valid even though there hasn't been one of those marriages in well over a hundred years. And our world is treaty bound to respect those marriages as if they were valid under our laws! The only way to undo this would be by an annulment!"

"So we get one of those..."

"Obviously you weren't paying attention when that was discussed after the meal. I guess you were too busy fuming about all of this. Just as in our world, there are only certain grounds to annul a marriage which would effective be the same as saying there never was one to begin with.

"One of the grounds is if the bride or groom is already married..."

"But..."

"That wouldn't apply to Hermione because she was Harry's first. And while it always applies where the bride is already married, it only applies to the groom if he lacks the legal basis for a Plural Marriage or if the bride was not aware she was entering into a plural marriage, none of which are the case here.

"Another case is fraud. Typically for them it is when the parents who signed a marriage contract were defrauded, although it can also apply to the bride and groom."

"Harry did say he was tricked," Robert said.

"And only he could seek an annulment then," Rose continued. "Even if he was tricked, he accepted the situation after learning so. He had to stop it then. It's too late now under their law.

"Then there's consanguinity," Rose continued, "marrying a person to close to you in kinship. But here their laws are like ours and while disgusting in a way, in our world first cousins can marry and it's the same in theirs, although also more common - at least among Pureblood families."

"There are those two sisters..."

"Which might have been an issue under their law had they married the same husband, but they did not. There were also two first cousins who became wives - those Davis and Greengrass girls - but even though that would have been okay, they too have different husbands. Ginny is Neville's second cousin by marriage. Ginny's grandmother's sister married Neville's Granduncle, but it's by blood that counts. The closest true degree of kinship is between Harry and his wife Daphne Greengrass. They're third cousins from House Black. None of the others are any closer, so that's out.

"Finally there's minority..."

"Got them there!" Robert said.

"Apparently, given the specific law they married under, it doesn't apply ... yet. Had they lied about their ages - claimed they were seventeen by outside calendar, the marriage could be annulled by either of them or us anytime before Harry's seventeenth birthday. But they married under an exception. Madam Bones explained it to me while you were moping about. The law in question was passed ages ago to discourage teenaged promiscuity and perceived sexual predation by Pureblood wizards on underage witches, in particular Muggle Born ones. There was also a concern about an ever increasing number of foundlings and bastards. One side of that law could force the father to marry the underage, pregnant mother, if any of the parents of the couple insisted. The other side, the one they used here, allowed the underage couple to marry without regard to parental or guardian or even Head of House permission. The marriage we're dealing with can only be annulled if Hermione either fails to carry her child to term or gives the child up for adoption before it bonds with her magically or it dies before then."

"That's it then?"

"NO IT'S NOT! I am not about to force or ask Hermione to abort her child! You know that! And, I am not about to let you or anyone else kill it later, not if I can prevent it! I am not about to pray for a miscarriage, still birth or early death for my grandchild and I am not about to even try to convince our daughter to give up our grandchild in any other way! I don't like this, Robert! But those are lines I will not cross!"

"So we're stuck then," Robert said.

Rose nodded.

"We should never have agreed to this Rose! We should never have allowed Hermione to come here!"

"Robert?" Rose began.

"Bloody impressive display, McGonagall did trying - successfully unfortunately - to convince us magic was real and our little girl was a bloody witch! Don't get me wrong, Rose! Until now, I was proud of her and all. But they took her away from us and have now ruined her! She'll never sit for her O Level exams, or whatever the bloody hell they're calling them now, never go on to prep or anything! We can forget about A Levels and University! Unless we want her to be a char woman or something, they took away our options for her and she deserved all options! I'm tempted to pull her out of this damnable school and this damnable world right now! But then what? Aside from this magic stuff, what has she studied in the last four years? We'd be lucky to get her into basic classes in a Comprehensive as a borderline retard at her age considering she might actually have to start back in Primary! We can forget about any prestigious Public School! Even if she aced an IQ test, they wouldn't take her considering how far behind she is! We never wanted to lose her and always wanted the best for her and this is our reward?"

"Robert?"

"No Rose! My little girl, my little Angel is stuck in this damnable world of hers and I can't fix it without totally ruining her life again! I never had enough time with her and to ... to try and get it back, I'd now ruin her future in either world. This is just so goddamned frustrating!"

"Robert, calm down!"

"WHY THE BLOODY HELL SHOULD I?"

"Do you hate Harry?"

"Ummm..."

"I know you, Robert. Despite any evidence to the contrary, you'd prefer our daughter remain virginal to her death. Aside from the fact that it's obviously not the case that it will come to pass, do you have any reason to hate Harry?"

"Ummm..."

"We both know Harry was Hermione's second real friend. There was that American girl in Primary, but she was only there for two years. From her first letters home, we both knew she considered Harry a friend in a way. He was always kind to her and never put her down or anything. We now know about the Troll and all that, which was when he went from being friendly in her letters to her best and truest friend. Even after last year, we still thought this was coming in a way - maybe not as a marriage but certainly as a boyfriend in the romantic sense."

"I kind of hoped he'd not get back with her after that broomstick episode," Robert said.

"Yet that told me everything," Rose replied. "She never had a true friend like Harry before and yet she'd risked it all, knowing he might then hate her forever, just to keep him safe. I knew then she was in love with him."

"As did I," Robert sighed.

"And I also hoped it was just either a teenage thing and would, as most such relationships do at that age, dissipate and end or that, were it real, develop far more slowly than it seems to have. Our daughter seems happy now, more so than I've ever seen her. She's far more mature and confident than I remember. I don't want to destroy that so that means I must come to accept all of this. I don't want to lose her, Robert!"

"Neither do I," Robert said softly. "It's just.."

"You totally missed out on terrifying the young suitor," Rose suggested. She then suggested: "You can still terrify the poor lad, Robert. But instead of scaring him away from Hermione, you can now scare him into being a brilliant husband."



"With eight other wives?"

"Seven of whom have fathers who are here, Robert! I can tell you after a private talk with Marilyn Abbott, we are also going to gang up on poor Harry and get the other mother-in-laws involved if necessary!"

"Wicked!" Robert almost sneered.

"And there's that Black fellow and Lupin," Rose added. "I don't think they would be happy if Harry didn't do right by Hermione or the others. And there's another thing, one far beyond terrifying poor Harry."

"Oh?"

"Robert, for ages our biggest concern regarding Hermione was time. Neither of us felt or feel we've truly spent enough time with our only child. You heard that bit, I know! For the rest of the world, we leave here on Sunday. It's just a weekend for them and does not affect our practice or anything to spend a weekend here at all. But for us? For us fifteen months will have passed! FIFTEEN! For that time, we have no practice to think about, no bills needing paying, nothing. And we're in Hermione's world for that time! We can actually see what the hell is going on and what she's learning and be parents again! We have no other responsibilities other than being Hermione's parents. We missed so much time before! We both felt we were losing our lovely little girl forever. Don't you see? Don't you see? She's given us this gift! She does not want to lose us and is giving us this gift! Fifteen months where we have nothing to do but be her parents!"

"There is that," Robert began.

"She said it herself," Rose continued. "We'll be here through her pregnancy and for the first six or seven month's of our grandchild's life! We have nothing better to do, do we?"

"It's almost sounding like a good deal when you put it that way," Robert said.

"That is why - that is what - that is the reason I'm almost willing to accept all this," Rose said. "I want to be our little girl's Mum, full time

and without all the business and other worries! Although I did see more of her than you, Robert, I too did not see enough when she was with us and now ... I don't want to truly lose our little girl! Fifteen months, Robert! For the next fifteen months, even though she is now married and there's nothing we can seemingly do about it, we have fifteen months where it's just us and her and all the other rubbish in our lives can wait! Oh, I so want that!"

"She's not our little girl anymore, is she?" Robert said somewhat sadly.

Rose snorted a little. "Arguably that age ended when she had her first period, which was not long before we first sent her off to Hogwarts by the way."

"I didn't need to know that," Robert complained.

"But surely even you've noticed that she's become a young woman? While she by no means flaunts them - at least not that we've seen - she does have breasts..."

"Don't! Don't! Don't! Don't DON'T!" Robert complained. "I refuse to even think that of my little girl!"

"But it's true, Robert," Rose said in a teasing tone. "She's had them certainly since she returned from Second Year!"

"I don't want to think about it," Robert complained. "I want to remember her as my little girl! I want to remember the little girl in the photo. You know the one? Hermione in her new school robes with a real smile on her face and her wand and that copy of Hogwarts: A History that she almost never put down that summer after our trip to Diagon Alley? I want to remember her as she was the last time she truly was our daughter. Ever since we sent her here, we've been losing her, Rose. Slowly but surely we've been losing her."

"It might have happened anyway," Rose suggested. "Teenagers tend to drift away from their parents."

"But we might not have noticed so much," Robert sighed. "She's gone for months and months at a time and we're not allowed to either visit or call. Our only communication by letters and we only get to see her on Holidays, assuming she hasn't made other plans!"

We saw her over that first Christmas when we took her skiing in the Alps. I thought we had a wonderful time of it. She had always loved skiing. Didn't see her again 'til the end of June, and then only for two months. And she was so distracted even then!"

"Harry wasn't returning her letters," Rose offered.

"Harry was twelve! That's hardly unusual behavior!"

"And there were the visits to your family and mine, Robert. She found it so hard having to avoid questions about her school."

Robert sighed. "There was that. What good is it getting top marks in Transfiguration and Charms if you can't tell most your family what the heck that even is? Her second year, she didn't even come home at Christmas. Didn't feel like going skiing! We didn't see her for ten full months! She did enjoy our holiday in France, although I believe it might not have been enjoyable if we avoided the magical sites. Even then, she learns Harry's run off from his damnable relations and... She cuts her time with us about a week short to go to the Weasleys and to Harry. Again, she didn't come home for Christmas..."

"She was taking a very heavy course load at the time," Rose commented.

Robert nodded. "And she cuts this summer off two weeks early to join her friends and that World Cup thing. And this year, again she stayed here over Christmas. Rose? By my count, she's spent almost thirty-six months away from us and it's more and more each year! That's three whole years for what? Six months or so with us?"

"Actually, we've missed fifty months," Rose said.

"What?"

"If you take into account her use of the Time Turner last year and Time Compression this year, she's about fourteen months older than she would be otherwise by my estimate. She told us earlier she was sixteen. Actually, while she's not yet seventeen, she's closer to seventeen than sixteen. Much as neither of us might like it, she's no longer a little girl. She is a young woman: a very pretty, poised, well spoken, intelligent and confident young woman! I'd say despite everything else we should be pleased with that."

"But..."

"And I never thought she was ever as young as her age. Part of her trouble in school before coming here was she only found one friend, another girl who was more mature than the others in their year. In some ways, I'd say she's more mature than we were when we got married."

"What?"

"Whether we agree with what she did or not, and whether we agree with why she did it or not, this whole thing was both planned and she had months and months in her time to make her final decision. She might not have told Harry everything up front, but she told him enough at least when it came to the two of them and what she wanted for them. She told Harry she was pregnant the day she found out and she knew within days of actual conception that she was pregnant. There was no dithering after that. The only reason they were not at Gringotts that day - two days ago for us - was because of the other Time Compressions. They did, however, got to Gringotts the very next real day - yesterday for us - and complete the marriage requirements. She had already invited us here for the weekend and I'm sure that while it was in anticipation of this, it would not have been revoked if she had changed her mind. And here it is, for us two days after she learns she's pregnant and the day after she and Harry are before their world's equivalent of a Justice of the Peace and she tells us in person with Harry present.

"Now consider us. Yes we were officially engaged at the time and they weren't - but you can't say we didn't see Harry and Hermione getting together at one point, can you? It was all but obvious Hermione had feelings for him since First Year and they seemed reciprocated, if somewhat awkwardly. That being said, Hermione was an accident! We don't regret it, but she was. It took me two weeks to work up the nerve to tell you I was pregnant and it took us three weeks to finally decide to get married sooner rather than later. Then it was at least another week before we told our parents and we did that over the phone! Which couple behaved more maturely?"

"When you put it that way..." he began.

"And, even though we may not like what is going on," Rose continued, "there is this to consider. She told us the Wards are activated. For now, the Elves can come and go as needed, but the rest of us cannot. We are stuck here until the Wards fully deactivate Sunday morning. There are other guests who will arrive, but they're just as stuck as we are. She said this was done to protect Sirius Black, among other reasons. Outside, he is the most wanted man in both Magical and Muggle Britain, after all.

"That being said, for the rest of the world we can leave here Sunday morning if we'd like after less than two days here. But for us and everyone else here in this Wing, fifteen months will have passed! Hermione invited us here knowing this would be the case but probably not totally certain she would be a part of this as a wife and all that! Fifteen months, Robert! Fifteen months were we have absolutely no outside responsibilities: no bills to pay, no errands to run, not chores to do around the home, no patients to worry about or practice to run! Fifteen months were our only responsibility is to be Hermione's parents and a part of her family! I won't say this gives us back the fifty months or so we've lost with her, but she's as concerned about our drift as we are and is giving us this wonderful chance and this chance is in her world, the one we know so little about and now have a unique opportunity to learn so much! We can be with her everyday! For the first time ever, perhaps, for breakfast, lunch and dinner and more! And she told me that because of what's happened - although she said she's explain this bit tomorrow - it is entirely probable that from now on we can come and visit her every weekend she's here for the rest of this year and the rest of her time at Hogwarts! If that's true, we won't have to wait ten or more months to see her again ... ever! If all else was necessary for her to give us this gift, I'm almost willing to say it is worth it!"

"I hadn't thought about it that way..."

"Probably 'cause you were plotting a thousand and one ways to kill Harry Potter for what he did to your little girl," Rose chuckled.

"And coming up empty given he's a wizard and what he did to me earlier," Robert said, "and realizing that Hermione would never, ever speak to me again if I even tried. And the fact that Hermione made it clear if Harry had not done that, she would have..."

"We haven't lost her, Robert. But to get her back, we have to accept this."

"Which is what makes this so bloody annoying," Robert said. "I KNOW THAT! I don't want to accept it, but I do know it's true! Deep down I knew that one day she might fall in love and it might be real and she might marry and might have children. I can't say I'd ever be ready for that. But this is so soon and bizarre and... But you're right, Rose. It may be too early. But he does seem to be a decent bloke, not even what I expected from her letters. We can't stop this and ... and there is the bit about allowing us to truly be a part of this. She's always been special. Even when we didn't understand half the things she did and could do, she was always special. What really has me frustrated is Harry is so damned hard to hate!" He sighed and sat down on the bed next to his wife with a sigh.

"There's another thing," she said softly.

"Bloody Hell what else could there be?" he complained.

"We've tried to have children again," Rose said with moisture appearing in her eyes. "At least three times and I lost them all early. Until she was nine or so and gave up, Hermione always said she wanted a little brother or sister as a present either for Christmas or her Birthday and we did try in time... You know my Doctor said it might have been due to the stress of my job, that if we really wanted another I'd have to take a Leave of Absence at least for the pregnancy and for a long time we could not afford to do that. For the next fifteen months for us, there is no stress! I'm still young enough and we do have two of their Healers here who specialize in what we'd call OBGYN and Pediatrics. We gave up after Hermione went off to Hogwarts partly because she wouldn't be with us, but now she is! Fifteen months, Robert! We never wanted her to be an only child..."

"Are you sure Rose?" Robert asked with a smile.

"We're not starting tonight," Rose said. "We're both too stressed out and..."

"That's not what I meant. I meant is this what you really want?"

Rose nodded and was rewarded by a huge smile from her husband, if only for a moment. When it disappeared she almost panicked. "Robert?"

"I'm on board with this," he said, "truly I am! But Rose? How do we explain this later?"

"What?"

"How do we explain any of this to our families? They'll have to know about Hermione and her child at one point and there's no way we can say the child was adopted. I'd like to think she's a very mature and responsible girl, but there's no way any agency or whatever would allow her to adopt any child! NO WAY! Not at fifteen or even eighteen! Her child will be what? Five months old at the least when we end this weekend? Maybe more? They all saw her back in August! She would have been showing by then! And if we claim it was born way premature - they'd still know something was up 'cause we'd most certainly have said something! And if we also have a child here at the very least you'd have been showing over Christmas! We could at least argue it's adopted, but I'm not about to let our own child believe that!"

"While you were fuming about what has happened," Rose said, "that's what's been bothering me since I gave up searching for a way out hours ago! My suggestion is we tell them the truth ... all of it!"

"But that Statute of Secrecy!"

"Applies to Hermione, not to us."

"What do you mean, Rose? Of course it applies to us!"

"Does it really?" Rose said. "Does it? We're Muggles after all. You'd think if it did, aside from encouraging us to keep quiet, they would have told us the penalties for not doing so!"

"But..."

"I asked that Amelia Bones this question when you were off fuming. The truth is, it does not apply to us as all! We could tell the whole bloody world without penalty for us or Hermione so long as she denies any of it! Muggles apparently blab or let it slip all the time, but

it never makes the papers - at least not the reputable ones. Tabloids, of course, print anything but as no one really believes them, the Magicals are unconcerned! No Muggle has ever been prosecuted for violation of that law because it does not apply to them."

"Really?"

Rose nodded. "And there's more! While you were off fuming, Hermione told me she and all the others had taken some kind of inheritance test when they were at Gringotts. So long as an ancestor was either born in the British Isles or, if not, opened an account at Gringotts and so long as they were alive from around the Eight Century, the Goblins can show you the entire British family tree - at least as to ancestors and not cousins and such. They're all still going through it, but the one thing that seems increasing certain is that there is no true such thing as a Muggle Born. Hermione, the other five ones like her, and the Muggle Born ancestors in the other lines that are British way back, all descended from a magical line at some point, one whose magic diminished for generations and then came back. In Hermione's case, she has magical ancestors on your side five hundred years or so ago and six hundred or so on mine.

"Now let's consider some other facts. What were we told to tell people about Hermione's school situation when we sent her off to Hogwarts?"

"As little as possible," Robert replied. "We've said she attends and elite but very small boarding school in Scotland and she's doing quite well in her classes and likes it there and..."

"And little else, and she never truly elaborates," Rose said. "And we're not called on it because we're not known to brag and Hermione's reticence has been taken as a sign of her growing maturity."

"Where's this going Rose?"

"My brother Danny has three children: Jake, Emma and Jenna. He and Marion tell us all they attend an elite boarding school in London but with little other details. Jake finished last year and is not in a University. He's said to have been accepted to an exclusive program for Zoologists or Ecologists or something overseas. Then there's your sister, whose oldest Justine is twelve and we're also told is in



and elite boarding school in London with no real details. This is what we've told them about Hermione and her school, see? It's what we were told to say!"

"But Hogwarts..."

"I learned tonight is not the only magical school in the British Isles. It is the oldest. It is also the only one that takes students from throughout the Isles, but there are four more! One in Scotland, Ireland, Wales and England, to be precise. Hermione, being a Muggle Born from England would have attended the English school had she not been selected at random for Hogwarts as they have some kind of lottery or something to pick their Muggle Born students. Had she not gone to Hogwarts, she would have received a letter to attend King's College of Magic in London - the English school!"

"And aside from our wedding, our families do not really mix," Robert said. "At least not the kids. They all know Hermione, but not each other through that. Your nieces and nephew are Carters and mine are Dawsons. They might not have made the connection!"

"Or they have through their parents, but have not made the connection about Hermione as she goes to a different school," Rose said. "This is all speculation, of course. But the facts suggest... Even if it's not true, however, at least with our parents and siblings, I think the truth about Hermione's child - and ours if we have one - and how this has happened should be told."

Robert thought for a while. "You really want to do this?" he asked. "To have another go at a child?"

Rose nodded. "I do," she said. "But we need to be willing to accept - even if it's grudgingly - what is going on with Hermione, Harry and the others. There really is little point if we can't accept that!"

Robert nodded. "I don't have to be totally friendly with him soon?"

Rose laughed. "That would seem odd, wouldn't it? No. Just give our Son-in-Law a chance."

"And the family?"

"We have fifteen months to think about that."

"And Hermione's present?"

"I want to set up an appointment with one of the Healers here to discuss that. I don't want another miscarriage! But we will tell her when the time comes."

"You do know I still think this is totally off," Robert said with a smile.  
"But, if this is truly what you want..."

"Thank you, Robert," Rose replied softly.

SATURDAY, APRIL 1st, 1995 - THE SOUTH WING.

When the dinner ended, the various families retired to somewhere private to talk. Hermione and her parents went to her apartment and Harry led Sirius and Remus to his study where the walls were lined with pictures of his wives. Sirius was not critical at all, thinking the Wing and now this were bloody brilliant pranks in a way, although he did bemoan the fact that his Godson had beaten him to marital bliss as it were and he needed to do something about it. Remus was not critical about the solution, although he continued to question why it was even necessary. He still had difficulty thinking ill of Dumbledore. Harry did his best to explain they did not know exactly what Dumbledore was up to and believed that asking would be pointless. Dumbledore had avoided all questions Harry had put to him thus far and things were moving too quickly to wait for information or an explanation from the man.

Harry spent much of the time talking about each of the girls and his month with each of them, although despite Sirius's pleading, he did stay clear of the "juicy bits" or any discussion of their "assets." He focused mostly on who they were and what he liked about them "outside of the bedroom." All the while, however, he was concerned about the meetings that were occurring down the hallway in the girls' apartments. He was far more concerned about Hermione with her parents. He figured about the only concern Hannah's mother would have was the age which, later that evening, was exactly what Hannah would say to him as this was her night with him.

Harry would not find out about Hermione's meeting with her parents until the next day and even then it would be some time before he got the entire story. Her parents were understandably very upset with her and the situation. Her situation was disturbing in both worlds for the adults and particularly for the highly educated Grangers who thought they had raised her to be an intellectual who understood that she was too young to begin a family, particularly if she truly wanted a career. Fortunately for Hermione, this discussion did not begin with just the three of them. Hermione's sitting room had additional guests who felt she needed support and knew they needed to convince the Muggles that there were reasons behind the reasons given, guests who were in a better position to speak of the threat and the conditions in magical society. Hannah and her mother as well as the Tonks family joined in support of Hermione, at least in general. None of the adults were thrilled with the idea that the girls

were married so young or that they were involved in a Plural Marriage. But the magical adults understood why and were probably better at explaining certain things than Hermione could be if only because the "official" version in books was inaccurate.

Marilyn Abbott was a Muggle Born as was Ted Tonks. Andy was a "liberal" Pureblood raised in one of the most bigoted Pureblood families and had been disowned by her parents for her beliefs. Between them, they were able to explain the prejudices of their society. Prejudice was always a matter of perception and not reality. In the case of Magical Britain and its bias against Muggle Borns in general and Muggle Born witches in particular, a social stratification that was not unheard of in the Muggle World, one based upon families, was exacerbated by the perceived animosity Muggles held for witches. It was odd that the anti-magical bias even when joined by the Church in the 14th Century was almost entirely directed at women, particularly as there were almost as many wizards as witches. But that was the case. The vast majority of "witches" who were executed in various ways for centuries were not witches as all. Of those real witches who were drowned, pressed or burnt at the stake, the vast majority were Muggle Borns. The Pureblood bigots blamed that on their lack of respect for magical culture. It may have been a factor, but it may also have been the case that the Muggle Borns felt comfortable in the Muggle World and thus were easier to "catch."

Andy told them of the two most famous real witches the English managed to execute. One was not English at all. She was a French peasant who had led an army that defeated the English in France. Joan of Arc was tried by the French and the Church and sent to England for execution as part of the momentary peace between the two almost perpetually warring nations. The other witch, while accused of witchcraft during her life, was executed by Henry VII for purely political reasons, namely to get rid of anyone who could challenge the legitimacy of his reign. This was Elizabeth Woodville, the alleged wife of King Edward IV (alleged because there were later accusations that Edward was already married). She was also the mother of the legendary "Princes in the Tower" who were supposedly murdered by Richard III. The problem was, after the Princes had been declared bastards by Parliament following the death of their father in 1483, they went somewhere else – Hogwarts. The reason they were never seen again was not because they were murdered, it was because they embraced their magic and left the

non-magical world, particularly when it was clear that if Richard the III would not have killed them, Henry the VII or his allies most certainly would have.

But the point was pressed home. Muggle Born witches were about as low on the social scale as one could get. They had few opportunities unless they married well. Madam Bones would never have been an Auror had her husband not been a Pureblood from an Ancient and Noble House. St. Mungos and the Healing profession in general lacked such bias, but in recent years few Muggle Borns had the Potion skills to enter that profession. Quidditch was also unbiased based upon bloodlines, but Muggle Borns were at a disadvantage because they never sat a broom before Hogwarts. For most Muggle Born witches who remained in the magical world, unless they started their own businesses, they were generally shop girls or clerical employees regardless of their marks. By marrying Harry, even under these circumstances, Hermione had secured a future for herself she could not attain any other way. She had ceased being a Muggle Born for all practical purposes.

As for the threat which had driven their daughter to this, the Grangers were given a lengthy lecture about Death Eaters and Voldemort. Andy was very well versed in this having been raised by a family that supported such things. She said they made the IRA look like rank amateurs and Hitler look like an egalitarian. They killed Muggles for sport. Muggle Borns and their families were brutally terminated as a matter of policy. For those who had connections with the murderers, there had been rumors of something disturbingly similar to the "Final Solution" and Death Camps should the Death Eaters come to power. Between 1971 and 1981, half the Muggle Borns known to be in Britain disappeared although most probably fled abroad and never returned. The Death Eaters faced little challenge at first as the government was indifferent. It was not until much later when they began killing Purebloods who would not support them that the government finally began to act aggressively. Most of magical Britain hoped those days were at an end as most were not in favor of that Cause, but all feared it was not so.

Dumbledore was a further problem. No one would deny he was an able Headmaster and educator for the most part. Nymphadora seriously questioned his choice for a Potions Professor but ... well it was well known that there was no real money in teaching Potions. Snape's predecessor was independently wealthy. Snape was not so

one had to wonder why he chose that position when he could easily make more money opening a shop in Diagon Alley or working at St. Mungos. Then again, it was also well known that he had been a Death Eater at one point. Dumbledore had vouched for him claiming he had been "reformed." The Tonks family did not think it possible to reform a sociopath, which seemed to be an apt description for anyone who bore the Mark. Dumbledore's biggest failing was his absolute belief and faith in redemption and unquestioning ability to forgive. He failed to see that some people truly were lost causes. This had severely hampered the ability of the Wizengamot to deal with the Death Eaters in an effective manner and the Emergency Acts that were eventually passed and arguably prevented the Death Eaters from winning, were passed when Dumbledore was out of the country on ICW business. The Tonks argued that if Dumbledore had an interest in Harry, that could not be good for Harry or anyone Harry considered a friend. If that interest was tied to Voldemort somehow, it was not good for anyone at all. They agreed and argued persuasively that the best thing for Harry, his friends and the magical world in general was to get Dumbledore out of his life.

Hermione's contribution was more personal. She had told them she felt they had been drifting apart and wanted that to stop and saw this as an opportunity to become a family again. But she also stressed that just because she was pregnant and would be having a child, she was not about to stop her education. If anything it would be accelerated. She told them they had planned the next day with that in mind. By the time the Spring Holiday was over, certainly all the Fourth and Fifth years and maybe the Third Years as well would sit for their O.W.L.s as two of the examiners were among the guests. It would not be in every subject, just the ones that mattered, she said. Once this weekend was over, they would still have to attend some classes as History of Magic, Astronomy, Care of Magical Creatures, Divination and Muggle Studies were not included in the Wing's courses. But in all the others, she hoped they would all be at least into NEWT level studies. Just before the Grangers left for their own room, Hermione gave her father a summary of Harry's finances they had received from Gringotts. If nothing else, money was not about to be an issue – ever. The Grangers left not happy, but far more accepting then when they had entered her library like apartment.

Twenty-four guest rooms had been filled on Friday with the thirty-seven guests who had already arrived. Most of them were the parents or Magical Guardians (or both) of the two families. All were

adults. Professors Tofty and Marchbanks were among the guests. Although they were not parents or grandparents or even great-grandparents of the young women, they were friends of Amelia Bones and Augusta Longbottom and were senior examiners who administered the OWLs and NEWTs. Ginny's father and brother Bill were already in the Wing as well.

At eight in the morning, the door from Hogwarts opened. It would not allow anyone inside to leave, in fact to anyone inside who was not a Potter or Longbottom, it was hidden. It opened to allow the remaining twenty-five guests to enter. All but eight were students. Of the adults, five were Hogwarts Professors and the sixth was Madam Maxine, Headmistress of Beauxbatons and the other two were Gabrielle's parents. Included on the guest list was Victor Krum and his fiancé Katya who would be coming up from Hogsmeade. The occupants of the Wing were not worried about "gate crashers." Only the guests could find the door with their invitations and the two least wanted people in Hogwarts from the occupants' standpoint, Professors Dumbledore and Snape, were away from the Castle. The new guests were not shown to their rooms directly. That would happen after lunch by which time the Wing's House Elves would have transferred their belongings to their rooms.

During the night, two of those elves had been busy. Dobby and Winky had received permission from Sirius Black to enter his family home and bring that library to the Wing to augment the Magical Library's already extensive collection. By ten in the morning, the transfer was complete, although Dobby did report the need to subdue another House Elf who seemed intent on defying the wishes of "The Great Harry Potter's Godfather." At ten, the door to Hogwarts closed and a bell sounded telling those who had been through it before that Time Compression had activated again.

Professor McGonagall was staring at a painting in one of the salons. It looked like something and yet it did not. It was mostly blues and, she thought, oddly pretty, but she had never seen anything like it.

"It's a late Monet," a voice said. She turned and saw a red haired girl, one of her students although she knew the girl was in Slytherin.

"Excuse me, Miss Rosier?" she said.

"Claude Monet. He was a Muggle French painter who painted from 1862 through the 1920's. I think this one was 1912 or so. It's called Water Lily's and is said to be frightfully expensive. This one isn't. It's just a reproduction. I think the frame cost more than the print."

"Now that you mention it, it does look like them," McGonagall said.

"We have about ninety reproductions of his works around here as well as several others from other French Impressionists although many say Monet was the Master of that style," Rosie said. "They're not supposed to look like a picture, I'm told, but to portray the essence of the scene or something like that. I find them very peaceful, don't you? Our Gabrielle picked them out. She's a huge fan of that style."

McGonagall nodded. "Where are we?" she asked after a moment.

"The South Wing," Rosie said.

"I know my invitation said that, Miss Rosier, and am too old to fall for an April Fool's prank! I can assure you this is not the South Wing!"

Rosie shrugged. "Can you?" Before McGonagall replied Rosie continued, "it will all be explained after lunch which will begin in about an hour in the Main Dining Room."

The lunch all but convinced McGonagall she was being pranked. This place, wherever it was, could not be a part of Hogwarts. Meals at Hogwarts were served "family style," all the food being placed magically upon the tables and each student selected what they wanted and placed it on their plates. Only the staff ate differently and most were so set in their ways they ate the same thing for lunch every day, thus the lack of selection at the staff table. That was not the case here. In this Dining Room, they all had menus with a surprising selection of dishes. An elf took their orders and several minutes later, their selection appeared before them. There was a surprising variety of selections, far more than she had ever recalled being available in the Great Hall. She had the Fish and Chips which, she was loathe to admit, was actually better than what she had either at Hogwarts or the Three Broomsticks, the latter claiming to have the best in Magical Britain. Another difference was the lunch was not "all you can eat." Perhaps this was a good thing as several students had atrocious eating habits – pile it on and shovel it in.



Most of the students here seemed to actually have decent table manners.

If one included students from the other two schools attending the Tri-Wizard Tournament, the Dining Room had almost the same number of adults as students. McGonagall was seated with the Grangers which again convinced her this could not be Hogwarts as she could not remember a time during her tenure as a professor when a Muggle had been to the school. She knew they had been at one time, but that was before Dumbledore had become Headmaster. There seemed to be some tension between Miss Granger and her parents, but the three did not discuss this at all. Aside from that, it was quite a pleasant lunch.

After the lunch, all the people gathered in what she was told was the Ballroom. It certainly looked like one with the parquet floors and such. It was not set up like one, however. At one end there was something not unlike a stage with nine chairs towards the back and a lectern or something similar near the front. Seventy-three chairs were arranged in seven rows, four rows of ten and three in back or eleven. McGonagall noticed that the back rows were the first to fill and the front row seemed reserved for the Hogwarts Professors and some others. Upon the stage she saw Harry, Hermione, Hannah Abbott, Neville Longbottom, Ginny Weasley and Susan Bones take seats along with three adults. She knew Amelia Bones, head of DMLE, but did not know the other two offhand.

When everyone was seated, Hermione walked to the lectern. "Good afternoon," she began. "For those of you who don't know me, I am Hermione Granger a Fourth Year here at Hogwarts. For those who don't know where we are, this is the abandoned South Wing of the Castle."

"Miss Granger," McGonagall said, "having been at this school for forty-six years if you include my time as a student, I am well familiar with the South Wing and this most certainly is not it. Surely this is a joke."

"It is not," Hermione said, "and while I'd like to think I have a sense of humor, pranking is not me. Then again with Fred and George Weasley here with us as well as two of the original Marauders..."

"Really?" one of the Twins said.

"Where?" the other one added.

"Think we can get an autograph?"

"Worship the very ground they walk upon?"

"Pick their brains for totally wicked pranking ideas?"

Hermione held up her hand. "Later boys. And I'm sure at least one of them would be thrilled to have you worship him. Be that as it may, this is the South Wing which a few of us have recently renovated..."

"Miss Granger, on what authority did you do this?" McGonagall asked.

"Why your's, Professor," Hermione said with a smile. "When Harry's name came out of the Goblet, you did allow us to use any unused part of the Castle for his training, did you not?"

"I did, but this...? How much of this Wing have you renovated?"

"All of it," Hermione replied.

"I certainly did not give you permission for that!"

"You also did not limit us to any particular space," Hermione added. "As we felt we needed as much space as this Wing had to offer and it was unused and full of junk, well there you go."

"I expect you to change this back by the end of the Holiday!"

"That's not going to happen," Harry said standing. "I, Lord Harry James Potter, Head of the Ancient and Noble House of Potter, by virtue of Blood Inheritance as confirmed at Gringotts, March 30th, 1995 do hereby claim my Birthright as magical and legal Heir of Godric Gryffindor!" As soon as he finished a bell rang out. It was different from the one in the Wing and much further off. A new ring also appeared on his left forefinger. It was not very fancy, just gold unadorned by any jewels, but there was a lion on it where a stone would have been. Harry knew at once it was the Gryffindor Ring.

"The bells of Hogwarts!" a voice gasped.

Hermione then spoke: "I, Lady Hermione Jane Potter nee Granger, by virtue of Blood Inheritance as confirmed at Gringotts, March 30th, 1995 do hereby claim my Birthright as magical and legal Heir of Rowena Ravenclaw!" The distant bell rang out again and there were more gasps.

"But how can that be? She's Muggle Born!"

"The magic in the Ravenclaw maternal line died out generations ago," Hermione said. "A daughter descendant of Ravenclaw was born a Squib and most likely was sent into the Muggle World. Do you think she let on she knew about magic? How long before her descendant daughters forgot they ever had a magical heritage? Two generations? Less? Do not assume that Muggle Borns are not from magical lines 'cause in most cases – maybe all – they are if you look back far enough!"

Susan then rose. "I, Lady Susan Amelia Bones, Head of the Ancient and Noble House of Bones, wife by Line Continuation of Lord Longbottom, by virtue of Blood Inheritance as confirmed at Gringotts, March 30th, 1995 do hereby claim my Birthright as magical and legal Heir of Helga Hufflepuff!" The distant bell sounded a third time.

"Merlin's Beard!" McGonagall whispered to herself. "It can't be!"

Neville then rose. "I, Lord Neville Augustus Longbottom, Head of the Ancient and Noble House of Longbottom, by virtue of Blood Inheritance as confirmed at Gringotts, March 30th, 1995 do hereby claim my Birthright as magical and legal Heir of Salazar Slytherin!" The distant bell sounded a fourth time followed by several others. The bells rang for several minutes before all was silent again.

"But you're in Gryffindor!" a student's voice protested.

Neville smiled. "Apparently when Tom Riddle, also known as You-Know-Who, snuffed it at the end of October 1981 – or at least his body did – the Slytherin line passed to the next closest descendant, which would be me apparently and no, I did not know that."

"Those of you who thought I was Slytherin's heir my Second Year," Harry added, "were not far off. My line is next in line after House Longbottom."

"What was with those bells?" someone asked.

McGonagall stood. "The bells of Hogwarts - as they were known - used to sound upon the return to the Castle of one of the founders. They're not real bells and you won't find them anywhere. It's part of the Castle's magic. As we could hear them, it is safe to say we're at Hogwarts. They have not sounded since Salazar Slytherin left the school and, according to legend and tradition, would never sound again unless and until the Heirs returned united as friends and family. It would appear that is what we've just witnessed."

"Birthright?" a voice asked.

"The Founders owned an equal and indivisible interest in Hogwarts and all or most of Hogsmeade Valley. Since it could not be divided, it could not be passed down unless some generations later the four heirs returned together and the heirs of Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff married the heirs of Gryffindor or Slytherin. Again, that seems to be the case which means they can claim as their own this Wing. It should be noted that in the thousand or so years since the founding of the school, the Heirs never reunited before now."

"Hold it," one of the twins said, "are you saying Harry and Hermione are married?"

"We are," Hermione said. "As of March 30th."

"When did you become – er – boyfriend/girlfriend?"

"The day before, I guess."

"That was quick!" a voice commented.

The other twin was looking at a piece of parchment. "Congratulations, Professor McGonagall!" he said.

"Excuse me?" Harry, Hermione and Professor McGonagall said almost in unison.

"It seems you won the pool!"

"What pool?" Hermione asked.

"The one about when you and Harry would finely figure out you're really a couple!" the twin laughed. "McGonagall picked by April 5th, 1995! She was the closest to the real date. Lee's gonna be pissed as he had the next closest with March 20th. Personally, I thought the Professor was a little optimistic considering how thick you two were but... I'll have the 52 Galleons and change for you on Monday, Professor!"

McGonagall was actually blushing.

"You had a pool about that?" Hermione asked in disbelief.

"Yup! Most of the staff and over half the students were in on it." "A Sickle a pick!" said the other twin.

"Why didn't you tell us?"

"Wouldn't be any fun if you knew about it up front," the first said.

"What's Ginny doing up there?" the other twin asked.

"She's Lady Longbottom now," Neville said proudly.

"Pay up!" that twin said. "I told you they'd be quicker about it than Mum and Dad!"

"Hold on! The bet was no potions and quicker!"

"Do fertility potions count?" Ginny asked.

"Is that a love potion?" the twin set to lose asked.

"Not really," Ginny said.

"Bugger!" the twin said reaching into his pocket and handing something to his brother.

"Thanks Gin!" the other one said.

"Hold on!" Mr. Weasley said, "you're saying you're married?"

Ginny nodded. "Hermione will explain."

"Before we begin, some introductions," Hermione said. "For those who don't know, this is Harry Potter, my husband. Also with us is his other wife via a Line Continuation Contract, Hannah Abbott, and I will be telling you all what that is and how this happened. We also have Neville Longbottom, his First Wife Ginny Weasley and his other wife by Line Continuation Susan Bones. Also with us up here is Amelia Bones, Head of DMLE and Ted Tonks, a Healer from St. Mungo's. Harry?"

Harry stood, "And now for the Marauders," he said. "About twenty years ago, Hogwarts played host to a group of four students who were considered legendary pranksters..."

"A true inspiration," one of the Twins said.

"Worthy of emulation," the second added.

"One called himself Prongs. He was my father James Potter and obviously cannot be with us today. Another was called Wormtail and he was the one who betrayed his friend – my father – and my mother to their deaths."

"Black!" someone said.

"His name was Peter Pettigrew and I'm sure the Weasleys are familiar with him." There were gasps.

"We never knew him!" Arthur protested.

"You knew him by a different name, Mr. Weasley, and in a different form. You knew him in his animagus form and your family called him Scabbers."

"Bloody Hell!" several redheaded men said.

"You know this?" Arthur asked.

"Surely Ron told you about last year," Harry replied although it was now obvious he had not.

"He said Dumbledore told him not to say anything about what happened at the end of last year," Arthur replied.

"Yes another nail in that coffin," Harry continued. "Scabbers was the traitor who allowed Voldemort to kill my parents and was the one who killed all those muggles just before turning into the rat that he is and escaping down a storm drain."

"That means Black is..." a voice began.

"Innocent of those crimes," Amelia said, "although we still have the issue of his also being an unregistered animagus to deal with. As soon as he can access his vaults, I will be expecting prompt payment of a fifty galleon fine."

"If you can catch him," said an oddly dressed wizard seated next to Luna. "He's really Stubby Boardman. He said to be invisible too."

Harry laughed. "Those of us who were students here last year know the third Marauder – arguably the brains of the operation. He is with us today. Please welcome back Moony, also known to us as Professor Lupin." Remus stood to an enthusiastic applause from the students and the staff from the school.

"Finally, here on stage is the last of the Marauders – in presentation, not in any other way. I'd like to introduce my Godfather, also known as Padfoot and also known as the not really invisible Lord Sirius Orion Black, Head of the Ancient and Noble House of Black."

Sirius stood, although it seemed the only ones applauding were the Weasley twins and the two girls who were with them.

"B-b-but he's said to be a murderer, a Death Eater!" someone said.

Sirius bared his left arm. There was another gasp as there was no dark mark. While for many the marked had faded after Voldemort disappeared, it never truly went away and the hidden marks became visible and had remained that way ever since. Sirius had no mark and therefore was not a Death Eater.

"As I said," Amelia spoke as she rose again, "it would seem Lord Black is the victim of a grave injustice perpetrated by our own government. As Head of Magical Law Enforcement, it is my duty to see justice is done, even as here where by doing so a supposed criminal is cleared and our political leaders must be forced to find

another excuse for what happens in our world. The law is supposed to protect the innocent and punish the guilty, not hide the mistakes and support the prejudices of the Ministry. To Lord Black, I apologize for what has happened to you and for the years our leadership robbed from you. You should not be having to get to know your Godson and yet for unjustifiable political reasons you are. As Head of DMLE, I will see this matter through to its proper conclusion and see you restored to your freedom, estates and family. I only wish it would be as easy as a flick of a pen. It may take some time."

Sirius nodded. "Thank you," he said softly. "That there is one honest and honorable person in government ... there remains hope for our future."

He had escorted her to the private dinner the night before and she had been quite gracious about it. But Sirius had to admit that the flame for her had long died even before she made it clear they could be friends, but no more than that. He still was not her type, she said. Besides, she reasoned, how could she as Head of DMLE help him if they were an item? It would ruin both of their credibility should his case come up. Amelia did point out to him later that Marilyn Abbott seemed to be paying particularly close attention to him and was a widow as well - and had been a year behind him in school. Sirius was too much the dog not to accept a freely offered bone as it were.

Amelia Bones promised Sirius and everyone present a proper trial for Lord Black in time. Sirius agreed to questioning under Veritaserum as soon as a batch was ready. Until then, he was under the protection of the Ancient and Noble Houses that now owned the South Wing and was free to remain upon their lands, which included Hogsmeade Valley. No Auror or other Ministry Official would be legally able to violate such sanctuary, although she could not extend that guarantee beyond the lands of Houses Potter, Longbottom, Bones, Abbott and now Granger/Ravenclaw. With the Black matter dealt with, Hermione allowed those who had been at Harry's dinner party the night before to leave, save herself, Madam Bone and Healer Tonks for the rest of the presentation was "old matters." This was also done to allow Harry and Neville to leave for their private apartments to avoid the storm that surely would be brewing as Hermione revealed all that the South Wing was about.



Harry soon found himself on the balcony of his Private Apartments for again it was a nice day with the warming charms in place and he liked the view. Andy Tonks and her daughter were off to one side with Sirius Black talking about something. Remus was enjoying the sunshine. He had already said he intended to enjoy as much of this as possible given his now fifteen month reprieve from his condition. Hannah and her mother were in bikinis enjoying the sun some distance away.

The plan was that the other guests and families would arrive once they had learned all and accepted it. The House Elves would act as gatekeepers as they could sense hostile intent. Basically, anyone allowed into Harry's Apartment (or Neville's upstairs) were accepting - even if reluctantly - of what was going on. Harry stared out at the lake wishing he could go for a fly on his broom.

"Harry?" a female voice asked.

Harry turned and saw the Grangers standing near him. Rose Granger pulled him into a brief hug.

"I wasn't expecting that," Harry said realizing he had flinched on contact.

"Whether I like it or not - and I am undecided at this time - you're now my Son-in-Law," Rose said.

"I'd ask you the question," Robert Granger said. "But it seems you already married my daughter. Still, what are your intentions towards my little girl?"

Harry nodded thinking. "She's very special, you know," he began.

Robert nodded.

"I'd have been quite content if it were just Hermione in my life," Harry continued. "Don't know what I ever did to deserve her. She's the one girl of all of my wives whom I loved before all of this and that's important. I want to do right by all of them, but especially Hermione. She's so ... so brilliant! I want this time to be the beginning of her life. Years from now I want this to be an admirable time for her, but just the beginning. I don't want her to peak at sixteen or seventeen, but I do want her to outshine everyone now, then and forever! Neville and

I may be the focus of a lot of this but don't kid yourselves. Hermione is the driving force! Without her, none of this would happen. She's crossed House lines here at Hogwarts. You have any idea how special that makes her? She's a Gryffindor who inspired Slytherins! Those two Houses hate each other on principal, but our Slytherins look to her for leadership. One day ... maybe ... Hermione will be Minister for Magic. She's be brilliant at it. If not that, I'd settle for Prime Minister of Great Britain, but... Whatever she wants and can attain, I'll see to it!"

"And the other girls," Robert Granger began.

"Brilliant too," Harry said, "the lot of them! I see my role as seeing to it that they can do whatever they're capable of doing now and even years and years from now."

"And you?" Rose asked. "What do you want?"

Harry frowned. "One day - maybe - I'll get that. What I want is a quiet life without all of this Boy-Who-Lived nonsense and without others trying to either control me or kill me. I always wanted a real family. After that and assuming I can get that life, I really don't know. There's too much expected of me in a way and I want nothing to do with it! It seems that Neville and I are stuck for now. I want to be unstuck and then figure that out."

"And where are you going to live?" Robert asked.

Harry explained that because he, Hermione, Neville and Susan were Founders Heirs, they would have to live here in the South Wing for six months of every year. He explained that the girls apartments could be expanded to about twice their current size without too much difficulty which would allow for three additional bedrooms and an additional bathroom if needed. As for the other six months of the year, Harry had several properties, most notably Potter Manor. As Hannah's consort, there were also Abbott properties where they could spend time. Finally, there was also the possibility of spending time at one of the Delacour properties. They had a "palace" in Paris, a large Manor and estate in the Loire Valley and a large Villa outside of Nice overlooking the sea. Harry admitted that he had yet to see any of these other places, or at least had no memory of them. He figured they would check them out this coming summer if possible.

"Did I miss something?" Rose asked sometime later.

"Excuse me?" Harry replied.

"You claim to be married and I have seen the papers confirming that, something Robert and I have to accept based upon your word and that of Ms. Bones, but none of you are wearing any rings? Is there a reason for that? Do people in this world wear wedding rings?"

"They do," Harry said, "or so I'm told."

"So it slipped your mind then? Not that I'm surprised. You're only fourteen or so."

"It didn't," Harry said. "I got them on Thursday. Just haven't had to time to give them to the girls yet. As soon as Hermione gets here, I'll correct that problem."

"And weddings?" she asked.

"I haven't thought about that," Harry admitted. "I wouldn't be surprised if Hermione has. She did say something about the magical ceremony being important, but aside from that..." Harry shrugged.

"Oh, there're going to be weddings," a new voice said. Harry saw that Hannah and her mother, both in bikinis, had joined them. "I'm Hannah," she said to the Grangers. They remembered her from the night before but had forgotten her name. The previous evening had been information overload. "This is my Mum, Marilyn," she added.

"Weddings?" Rose asked.

Hannah nodded. "We spent the last two days shopping for all kinds of things. Our elves can make a lot, but wedding dresses and such are best left to designers and such. Hermione's plan is that the weddings will begin on Day Eight of Time Compression at the soonest. Should give us all time to make the final arrangements and plans. Harry and Hermione will be first..."

"We are?" Harry asked.

"That's really quick," Rose added.

"Yes you are," Hannah said, "and Mrs. Granger don't worry. The Elves will spend time with you and Hermione to make it as perfect a day as possible. Unfortunately, we won't be able to invite any more guests, so it will be just the people we have here. Still, it should be wonderful!"

"Have you picked Bridesmaids and such?" Rose asked.

"Oh yes," Hannah said. "Those of us who have sisters, well they'll be bridesmaids. And most of us is going to be a maid ... no matron of honor at least once and all of us a bridesmaid at least a few times as well. Each wedding will have four groomsmen and bridesmaids. We were thinking of no more than three, but Ginny insisted she wanted her brothers to stand with her and Neville agreed so it's four."

"And the Groomsmen and Best Man?" Rose Granger asked.

"That's up to Harry, isn't it," Hannah said, "although I hope he will agree not to have Sirius Black as Best Man or Groomsman at our wedding."

"Why not?" Harry and others asked.

"'Cause he's your Godfather and I lost my Daddy in the War," Hannah said. "I'm hoping he'll agree to escort me down the aisle in Daddy's place."

"We'll need to ask him," Marilyn said. "I think he's a good choice, but he needs to agree..."

"Oi! Sirius," Harry called out waiving Sirius and Remus over (and proving he was still fourteen or so in the Grangers' eyes but also thoughtful as well.)

"You rang?" Sirius quipped as he and Remus arrived.

"We're talking 'bout weddings," Harry began.

"Good to know, but why am I here?" Sirius asked. "Aside from being your godfather that is?"

"Need some best men things," Harry said. "I figure you and Neville and Professor Lupin..."

"Harry, I'm no longer," Remus began.

"You will be again," Harry said. "But that's not why I called you over. Hannah?"

"Lord Black?" she asked. "For now, Harry and I are to be married by ceremony on Day Ten. Hermione and he will be married that way on Day Eight. My Daddy died during the War and my Mum and I would be honored if you'd agree to stand up for me in his stead - escort me down the aisle?"

Sirius was dumbfounded for a good minute and many wondered if he had also forgotten how to breath. "I - I would be honored," he stammered.

They spoke for some time about the schedule for the next few weeks. Hannah told them that training would resume on Day 3 and would be four hours a day, every day including wedding days from just after breakfast until lunch. The weddings would take place around dinner time which would allow the bride five or six hours to get ready, something Harry did not understand but decided not to press the matter. Harry had tentatively decided that Neville, Remus and Sirius would stand as Best Man for him at three weddings each. Neville would be Best Man for him at his weddings with Hermione, Luna and Rosie. Remus would be Best Man at his weddings with Hannah, Padma and Daphne and Sirius would be there with Harry when he married Katie, Marcia and Gabrielle.

About two hours passed from when Harry returned to his Apartments and Hermione finally showed up. As soon as she entered the Apartments, she apparently headed to her room to change which allowed Harry a little time to retrieve the shopping bags from his study and set them up beside a chair at a small table on the balcony. Hermione arrived in a robe and was probably wearing a bikini underneath. Harry waived her over to the table where she and Hannah joined him and the other adults stood nearby.

"How'd it go?" Harry asked Hermione.

She shrugged. "No lynch mobs that I could tell. McGonagall's lips disappeared a few times..." Which meant she was very angry about something. "Of the parents, I'd say our Muggle Borns' parents are confused, the Patils look rather put out and I have no idea what Mr. Weasley's thinking. You?"

"No one tried to kill me, hex me or toss me off the balcony," Harry shrugged.

"I suppose that's a good thing," Hermione nodded. "What's in the bags?" she asked noticing nine shopping bags.

Harry smiled and reached into two of the bags and pulled out a box from each. "Just some small presents," he said. He handed a box to Hermione and another to Hannah. They opened them and saw they each had a pair of very nice pearl earrings. Hermione smiled at first and then gave Harry a look. "Not finished yet," he smiled as he handed each of them two more boxes, these two had opal earrings. The diamond earrings elicited the first gasp from the girls and their mothers.

"These are lovely," Hannah said.

"Are they real?" Hermione asked.

"They better be considering what they cost," Harry said as he handed out two long boxes.

The girls smiled at their new gold necklaces which they then passed to their mothers as Harry handed them another box inside of which were pearl necklaces. Then came the very expensive diamond necklaces.

"Harry!" Hermione said, "this is too much!"

Harry shrugged. "I don't think so," he said. "Then again, don't expect all this every time I go out shopping," he added as he handed them another long box. "This last one is custom made for each of you featuring your birth gems." Hermione opened hers and saw deep blue gems which she knew were sapphires. Hannah's stones were yellow.

Hermione and Hannah were speechless.

"All of that lead to this," Harry said. "I should have done this the right way, the normal way. Should have dated you two for a bit at least then met the parents and hopefully charmed them into liking me - figuratively speaking of course - then asked you proper to marry me. But I guess normal and Harry Potter don't work. Still, I want you two to know that I don't regret this at all."

He handed a box to Hermione first and then another to Hannah. They each opened theirs and saw their two carat diamond rings. Hermione's was set in platinum and Hannah's in gold. Neither made any move to do anything but look at them, so Harry removed the one from Hermione's box and placed it on her finger. It magically resized itself to be a perfect fit. He then did the same for Hannah.

"I guess that makes it official," Sirius quipped.

"Not quite," Harry said. "Those are just 'engagement' rings. It's not official until I put these rings on their fingers," he said producing two more boxes. He showed them to the girls. Hermione's was also a platinum band and had three small diamonds and two small sapphires whereas Hannah's gold ring had three diamonds and two citrines, just like the stones in her custom necklace. He gave them each a few minutes to look at the rings and allow their parents to do so as well before he retrieved the boxes and placed them in the bags. "Hannah said there will be weddings," Harry said. "You will get these on that day."

"And you?" Hermione asked choking up.

Harry produced two more boxes. One had a plain platinum band and the other a plain gold one. "These rings will magically join together. Hermione's will be first. Then, when Hannah places hers on my finger, they'll magically intertwine. As will the others. In the end, it will look kind of like a rope, with five platinum strands interwoven with four gold strands, each strand matching the gold or platinum in the ring of the wife who gave it to me."

"So you got stuff like this for all of us?" Hannah asked.

"Of course," Harry said.

"When?"

"Right after we got Neville's new wand," Harry said. "We had a couple of hours to kill before we met up with the others and he suggested the jewelry store. We went in for rings at first and ... I guess we kind of got a little carried away."

"A little carried away?" Hermione asked. "How much did this cost you?"

"You know that doesn't really matter," Harry replied.

"How much?"

"'Bout thirty thousand."

"Quid?" Robert asked.

"Galleons," Harry replied. "Neville says we got a pretty good deal..."

"A hundred and fifty thousand quid...?"

"Roughly seventeen thousand each," Harry said. "I think they deserve it, don't you?"

"But they're just girls..."

"They're also my wives," Harry said. "I'm told that's kind of a permanent thing in this world. I would probably never have done this for a girlfriend, but a wife is another matter altogether, don't you think?"



SATURDAY, APRIL 1st, 1995 - THE SOUTH WING - TIME COMPRESSION DAY 1.

Professor McGonagall was enjoying a wonderful dinner in the Main Dining Room at a table with the Grangers and Greengrasses. It was lovely because the food was amazing, but also because of the company and what she observed. Hermione was one of her favorite students, then again most of her favorites were here. Daphne was a "closet Gryffindor" as was her sister Astoria who was a First Year. This meant that Daphne preferred to come to Professor McGonagall with her problems, whatever they were, rather than her own Head of House. This was not unusual really. Most students had a staff member they chose as mentor. McGonagall knew that Harry's was Hagrid and Neville's was Pomona Sprout. But Hermione was her charge as were Daphne and Astoria and others as well.

She was still a little upset about what these students had done and that none of them had confided in her beforehand. But they had laid it all out at the meeting earlier and she could understand why they had acted as they did. Their "evidence" against Dumbledore was voluminous and disturbing in many ways and it had clearly affected the audience. They had been clear that they had loads of facts as to the whats and hows, but none of them were willing to put forward a certain why. One possible why would force her to believe that Dumbledore was as dark as Voldemort in many ways. The students did not dismiss this possibility, but they also did not embrace it. Hermione had told her that they all believed that Dumbledore would try and reassert his authority over Harry. If he was truly dark masquerading as light, that would soon be apparent. If not, they would soon learn why he had acted the way he had, or so they hoped.

As upset as she might have been, McGonagall was impressed with what these young people were doing. Just looking around the Dining Room was a lesson in a way. Gone were the House lines that were seldom crossed at Hogwarts and even later in life. Her own table proved that as Slytherins sat with Gryffindors and Purebloods sat and conversed with Muggles. There were no lines here she could see aside from maybe House Potter and House Longbottom, although even that was not truly clear as it seemed more that friends sat with friends here. She'd even seen it earlier. Many of the families whose daughters were now married included siblings and they were allowed to pick their own rooms and roommates in the Wing - so

long as they were of the same gender. Daniel Urquhart was a First Year Slytherin and he was rooming with Jason Lee, a Muggle Born First Year Hufflepuff. Much to McGonagall's chagrin, the two had declared themselves as apprentices to the Weasley twins and, by extension, the Marauders. A Slytherin and Hufflepuff conspiring together, this was a very different place. Deep down, McGonagall was beginning to see it was a much better place or at least it could be.

She then noticed the other Tri-Wizard Champions were seated in the room, Fleur Delacour was at Harry's table with her parents, her sister and the Abbots and Lovegoods. Victor Krum was seated with a lovely blonde whom McGonagall did not recognize as well as Cedric Diggory and Cho Chang and the Turpin family. McGonagall raised an eyebrow.

"Why are the other Champions here?" she asked.

"It's only fair really," Hermione said. "Fleur's sister Gabrielle is one of Harry's wives so we had to invite her as with an exception or two we invited all families. We left out Mrs. Weasley and Ron and Percy and, of course, Harry's Aunt and Uncle. Since Fleur had to be here, we figured we should invite the others as well so that none can claim any unfair advantage in the Tournament."

"Who's the young lady with Mr. Krum?"

"She's his fiancé," Hermione said. "They've been together since they were very young. She attends the witches' school nearby. Her name is Katya and she sounds amazing. Then again, Victor truly loves her. Still, I don't think he's truly capable of exaggeration so I do hope she likes it here and makes friends."

"I see Madam Maxine, but not Karkarov," McGonagall noted.

Hermione nodded. "As Gabrielle is one of her students, we felt she should be here as well. There are no Durmstrang students involved in these marriages so no reason to even consider inviting their Headmaster. We know he was a Death Eater once."

"How?" McGonagall asked.

"It came up in the Ministry Records some of the others collected over the Hols when we were trying to figure out what all was going on. For us, Karkarov is the most likely suspect in getting Harry into this infernal madness, but that's simply because we have no others aside from maybe Professor Snape. Then again, we also haven't ruled out Dumbledore because he was the one who signed off on this as Harry's guardian."

"You have those records?"

"You will find we have an extensive collection in our magical library," Daphne said.

"Over fifty thousand volumes not including copies," Hermione said. "My elf Winky is in charge of the collection and she and other elves have been very busy. The collection also includes another thirty-seven thousand in our recreational library, mostly works of literature and novels and such. Again, that does not include copies and for certain books we do have multiple copies."

"Such as?"

"Some of Shakespeare's more popular plays, although I think we have all of his works," Hermione said, "Tolkien's 'Hobbit' and 'Lord of the Rings,' C.S. Lewis 'Chronicles of Narnia,' Isaac Asimov's Robot and Foundation series, Patrick O'Brian, Frank Herbert's Dune series, Douglas Adams, Jane Austin - naturally, Charles Dickens, to name but a few."

"Like the art on the walls," Rose Grange said, "masterpieces!"

"We found a shop in London that had the art," Daphne said. "Gabrielle is quite familiar with it and selected the works of the Masters. There were others we like as well."

Hermione laughed.

"What?" several voices asked.

"You should see what we put in Sirius's room," she said. "I don't think the muggles consider it 'art' per se."

"What did you put there?" McGonagall asked.

"A painting of dogs playing cards," Hermione said. "He thinks it's funny, which was the intent."

"Ours is a Degas," Rose noted.

"Gabrielle has a thing for the French School," Hermione nodded. "Not that we mind. They are wonderful, don't you think?"

Rose nodded. "It's a bit much."

"Is it?" Hermione replied. "Daphne and I have already spent a year in here and are about to spend another fifteen months."

"Our first two month were ... basic," Daphne said. "We slept on camp beds on this floor which was totally gutted. We had a couple of long tables, one for eating and the other for research and whatnot. We had a large, open shower and some stalls and sinks and that was pretty much it. We ate camp rations the first month. By our second month the kitchens were ready. This is much nicer. It was almost like a big slumber party, except we were usually so knackered from working on this place all day and researching things that we pretty much fell asleep."

"It was surprisingly hard work," Hermione nodded. "And we did it all before we took the inheritance tests at Gringotts and learned that four of us were Founders' Heirs and what that meant. Until then, we figured we had a good chance of keeping our Private Apartments as there's not such quarters in the school. Now we know we can keep the lot and as we will have to live here six months out of the year for the rest of our lives, we intend to keep it!"

"We might make some changes as time moves along," Daphne added. "We can add three more bedrooms to our personal apartments and another bath as we have more children and we can probably double the number of guest rooms so our friends and families can visit."

"How?" Robert asked.

"Expansion charms," McGonagall replied. "It's fairly easy to expand an interior space with magic. The trick is keeping it that way..."

"And as Hogsmeade Valley happens to lie on a magical node - similar to a magnetic pole," Hermione said, "and a powerful one at that, keeping it that way is actually easy. It's harder if you're trying it somewhere other than a magical node."

As their appetizers appeared so did an elf who handed Hermione a clipboard. "Thank you, Winky," she said.

"What's that?" McGonagall asked.

"A report on our recent acquisitions from the Black estate," Hermione said. "As we have no elves from that House in service, we had to send a raiding party. No casualties for our elves," she added looking at Daphne, "but they had to subdue three Black elves and destroyed a portrait that was giving them trouble in London."

"Subdue?"

"Stunned, bound and when the mission was completed added a memory modification," Hermione said. "Hopefully those elves are none the wiser."

"But if you took books..."

"They were inventoried and books of interest copied," Hermione said. "Seems there were several books of probable interest out of the 387 they copied and brought. The Blacks had a rather extensive collection on Necromancy."

"Necromancy?" McGonagall asked in shock! "That's among the darkest magic there is! Human sacrifice and all of that!"

"We're not about to create an army of Inferi," Daphne began.

"What's that?" Robert asked.

"Think Zombies," Hermione said. "It's practically the same thing in a way. Nasty things."

"You dealt with those?" Rose asked.

"No Mum and neither has Harry, but we've heard about them. But these books will be useful, I think," she added handing the clipboard to Daphne.

"I fail to see how," McGonagall began.

"Voldemort somehow managed not to die when his body was destroyed in '81," Hermione said. "We know he doesn't have a Philosopher's Stone and can't have made the Elixir of Life..."

"That's real?" Robert asked.

"As is or was Nicholas Flamel," Hermione said. "Dumbledore supposedly hid Flamel's stone here our first year. If Voldemort had one, why would he try to steal it?"

"So he did something else to evade death. The works we got from Daphne's house and the Urquhart's suggest it might have been something based upon Necromancy. Their books tell us how to defeat such arts and detect them, but not much about what they are or how they work. We needed something like this to figure out what Voldemort did so we can figure out how to counter it and kill the bastard once and for all."

"But dark arts?" McGonagall began.

"If you know yourself but not your enemy," Daphne began, "for every battle won there shall be a battle lost. If you know yourself and your enemy, you cannot lose. If you know not yourself, you cannot win. It's from a work by a Muggle general over two thousand years ago named Sun Tsu. To defeat Voldemort and his Death Eaters, we have to know about the Dark Arts! They rely on them! We don't have to delve into them, but we have to know them and how to counter them!"

"And what makes you think you need to do that?" McGonagall asked.

"Because no one really bothered to last time," Hermione said. "That war was damn near lost and had it been lost, the Muggles would have become involved. That would have been the end of everything!"

"What do you mean?"

"It would have gone nuclear," Robert said. "We have weapons that can destroy entire cities, entire countries forever that can hit anywhere on earth accurately in a half hour or less and cannot be stopped. Britain has hundreds of them, maybe more. The Americans and Russians have thousands of them and more. We're not the only ones. The Chinese, French and Pakistani's have them now as do the Israelis. India and South Africa have that capability as well. Were there to be a general exchange - and a serious launch by anyone would trigger it - nothing would be left! Well, maybe some bacteria and the cockroaches, but everything else would die."

"Magic would not save us," Hermione said. "If we survived the initial onslaught, nothing would grow. There'd be no food. The survivors would be doomed to vile sickness or starvation. Voldemort wants to take over. No one will let him outside of our world. Britain would be poisoned for a million years! Nothing would be left alive!"

"And the rest of the world would probably go with us," Robert added. "Voldemort is your problem and you need to deal with him and his ilk decisively! Should our world get involved ... better dead than slavery! We will destroy everything if pushed like that!"

"Is this true?" McGonagall asked looking at Hermione.

She nodded. "For fifty years the Sword of Damocles has hovered over us and not dropped. Two cities in Japan felt that wrath in 1945. 160,000 died instantly or nearly so. Another quarter million or so died from the after effects over time, and those were small bombs by today's standards."

"Today's weapons are over twenty times as nasty," Robert said. "Some are hundreds of times as nasty. Britain is a nuclear power and will not accept slavery. The other nuclear powers will destroy a threat rather than let it take them over. In recent years, things have become less tense in our world and the arsenals are smaller than a decade ago, but they can still blow up the entire world, just not as many times over as before."

"You would do that?" McGonagall asked.

Robert shrugged. "I'm not the Prime Minister. Can't say what he'd do and it doesn't really matter. The Americans and Russians would

probably nuke us if this Dark Lord of yours ever attained power and tried to spread it beyond these shores. And if other magicals elsewhere took up his cause, it would all be over in an hour or so. The entire human race would be condemned to death!"

"Voldemort and his followers must be defeated," Hermione said.

"Utterly," Daphne added. "Without quarter! Admittedly, that probably means Snape too and at least two thirds of my House will need to be put to the sword, but that's a small price to pay considering the alternative. The survival of the magical world is at stake at the very least. Those who would follow Voldemort ... they are rabid animals and it is for the Greater Good that they should be put down!"

McGonagall looked at Hermione.

"The enemy would have me and my family killed," she said. "We're not advocating extermination camps - something I wouldn't put past Malfoy and his ilk - but stand against the Light and you will reap the hurricane!"

"Albus would never..." McGonagall began.

"Which is why he's failed," Daphne said. "Mercy and understanding are admirable, but they are not always advisable. Harry and Neville were roped into this mess without choice or anything and they seem to be important. We've concluded that the only good Death Eater is a dead one. We've seen their trial and interrogation transcripts. We know that the Imperius Curse cannot make one take the Mark. It may be possible to coerce someone into it, but they still have to murder and rape of their free will to take the Mark. They are nothing more than animals!"

"They called themselves Death Eaters," Hermione said. "We've decided should they reappear they should be eating death, as it were. Voldemort hides behind them according to our records. That means they need to be eliminated."

"We do a good enough job of it and he may have difficulty recruiting," Daphne added. "There're not many who'll sign up for suicide."

"Why this?" McGonagall asked.



"We're all about to be mothers," Hermione said. "We don't want our children growing up in the world as it is."

"We want the Death Eaters gone for them," Daphne said. "We want the world that gave rise to them gone for them. You adults failed to do that for us, we will not fail our children in this! If Voldemort returns as we believe he will, then he and all who rally to him have signed their death warrants and we intend to see those warrants executed!"

"So you're proposing to go to war with them if they return?" McGonagall asked.

"Um ... no, not really," Daphne replied sheepishly realizing she had gotten a little carried away. "We intend to be prepared to defend ourselves, that much is certain. We also intend to shake things up in the Wizengamot if they fail to act on their own. We currently have direct control of the votes for four Ancient and Noble Houses between Harry, Neville and their families. We think we can also manage to get the House Black proxies transferred to us - or rather to our proxy holders which are and will remain Madam Bones and Madam Longbottom as none of us can claim a seat until we're twenty-one. The Black vote brings in its proxies which include House LeStrange, Gibbon, Jugson, Mulciber and Travers. Admittedly, none of those have as many votes as House Black or the other Ancient and Noble Houses, but together they are not insubstantial. If our allied Houses join us, we would have close to a majority of all votes and enough votes for a quorum. Basically, even without our allied Houses, the five Ancient and Noble Houses voting as one would create the largest united voting block in the Wizengamot and you know how that works. The others tend to follow the votes."

"And what do you plan to do with these votes?"

"Force the Ministry to act if he comes back, although Madam Bones probably would anyway. We'd just see to it she has strong support in the Wizengamot. Lucinda already has prepared a bill authorizing absolute disenfranchisement of marked Death Eaters and their descendants. It would also require forfeiture of their estates and vaults."

"There were laws like that before," McGonagall began.

"Which were either never enforced because it was considered too disruptive to society or the bans were lifted at least for those suspected Death Eaters who avoided Azkaban. The Wizengamot was afraid of upsetting the social order, meaning the Pureblood dominated social order."

"We have no such restrictions," Hermione added. "That order is the problem. It is that order that allowed Voldemort to exist and to begin his terror campaign. It is that order that found him followers. And it is that order that allows the bigotry to remain in effect. We're not saying we intend to take down all Purebloods, just those who are part of the problem and not willing to become part of the solution. But that's down the road. First thing we need to do is make sure we're prepared for what we believe is coming, hence this Wing and Time Compression and our plans for the remainder of this Holiday, which for us will be fifteen months long."

"I see," McGonagall said. "And how do you intend to prepare?"

"Well," Hermione said, "you don't think we invited you for a fifteen month holiday, do you? The same is true for the other Professors. During our previous Time Compressions, the lot of us studied and practiced as well as doing whatever else we were doing. All of us have completed the course work through the end of Fourth Year in Runes, Arithmancy, Charms, Defense Against the Dark Arts, Herbology, Potions and Transfiguration and Harry and Neville have also studied basic Healing, French and Italian. We all also studied Occlumency and Dueling. We have all taken the standard I.C.W. exams in most of those courses, again through Fourth Year.

"We intend to continue our training and education while we are here. We're short a Professor in Potions and Defense. None of us wanted Snape here, but Mrs. Tonks is a Potions Mistress as is Mrs. Longbottom and could probably continue our education in that field. Professor Lupin has taught Defense, so we think he's suitable. We have two Healers and a Healer's Assistant to teach us basic Healing. We have an Auror, a Hit Wizard and a Master Duelist to continue our Dueling training. We also have a Gringotts Curse Breaker who we're going to ask to teach us curse breaking and Warding. Finally, we have others who we may ask to teach History, Politics and Law."

"Ambitious," McGonagall said.

Hermione nodded.

"You have students here from all seven years. Have you thought about schedules?"

Hermione nodded. "We're only going to have four classes. We have five classrooms downstairs on the North Side, although one is for Potions, and a greenhouse on the top floor for Herbology. Magical and Physical Training will be held South Side downstairs where we have a dueling room, a huge gym and swimming pool. One class will have the First and Second Years and the goal is to get the lot of them finished through at least Second Year if not Third. There will be eight students in that class. The Third through Fifth Years will be divided into two classes. One will have House Longbottom plus Cho Chang. The other will be House Potter. The goal is for the lot of us to sit for our O.W.L.s by around Day 300 and to complete the course work through at least the middle of Sixth Year by the end of Compression, which will be Day 450. The last class will be Sixth and Seventh Years. The goal for all eight of them is to sit for their NEWTs at the very least."

"That explains the two members of the Examination Board," McGonagall said.

Hermione nodded. "And while they are certified to test in all subjects, we do have several here with Masteries who are also authorized to conduct examinations.

"Classes will begin at eight. Two of the classes will have training, either magical or physical from 8:00 until 9:30 and classes from 9:30 until 12:30. Classes will be in the same classroom except for Herbology and Potions and maybe Healing which could be taught in the Infirmary. The other two classes will have class from 8:00 until 11:00 and training from 11:00 until 12:30. Lunch will be from 12:30 until 1:30. Two classes will then have training from 1:30 until 3:00 and classes from 3:00 until 6:00 while the other two will have class from 1:30 until 4:30 with training from 4:30 'til 6:00. Dinner will begin at 6:30. Study and research projects will occur during open periods, if there are any, and until 11:00 at night.

"Classes will begin on Day 28 for now. That should give our instructors time to prepare. We have standard course books through Seventh Year in all the subjects taught at Hogwarts and enough of

them for everyone who needs them. We also have course books in the other courses as well, not to mention our Library which is at least as good as Hogwarts. Classes will run five days in a row with one day off, which gives us up to 70 class weeks, although we might pare it down to 65 or less."

"Why?"

"Babies," Hermione said with a blush. "We expect they will be due between Day 330 and 360 and most likely between days 340 and 350. We think it would be prudent to suspend classes when most of the Third through Fifth Years are going through labor and delivery. After that, we may need to modify the schedule to take into account child care, although some of us are of the opinion that the elves and grandparents could help in that regard, but we'll work that out later."

"Why are we waiting so long to start?" McGonagall asked.

"In addition to allowing you time to prepare, we will be busy," Hermione replied.

"With what?"

"Weddings."

"But you're already," McGonagall began.

"Most of us still want the wedding," Daphne said.

"Most?"

"Luna's indifferent about it, but is going ahead anyway," Hermione said. "She's not indifferent about being Harry's wife. She's all for that. She's just not into dressing up and such. The Patils aren't certain about their parents. Apparently, their father had them locked into a marriage contract with some rich man back in India and they're fairly certain he won't be happy about what happened. Then again, the two of them wanted nothing to do with their chosen husband..." Hermione shrugged.

The Grangers frowned at this but said nothing. They had been told all of this last night following dinner, but still thought the practice of arranged marriages to be both antiquated and barbaric. They still

were unsure about this Plural Marriage, but could now see why it might seem attractive to many of the young women, particularly given their choice of husbands both now and before.

The conversation was interrupted by some late arrivals for dinner. The Bells and Weasleys had arrived. Katie and her family sat at a table with Fred, George, Angelina and Alicia. Ginny, her father and brother Bill joined a table with Neville, his Gran and Susan and Amelia Bones.

"Is this everyone?" McGonagall asked no one in particular.

"No, Professor," Hermione replied. "We're still missing four families: the Caldwells, Lees, Robbins and Patils. Three of them are Muggleborns and from experience I can say they have a lot to talk about."

Robert snorted.

"The Patils have that contract issue," Hermione said. "Just about every non-Muggle Born girl who's a part of this and had a contract out there could get out of it even if this had not happened. Ginny and the Patils were the exceptions. They were all to be married before they were seventeen and old enough to refuse or choose another. For them, this was the only way to take control of their lives. We suspected Ginny's Mum was the driving force behind her contract. We know the Patil's father was."

"I noticed Molly is not here," McGonagall said.

Hermione nodded. "Ginny felt it would cause too many issues. Mrs. Weasley is entirely too supportive of Dumbledore for one. And, if Molly were to come here, we'd have to invite Ron too. We're not sure he'd be supportive of this."

Daphne snorted.

"Fine, we know he'd be a moody, jealous git about it," Hermione said. "It would probably be as bad as it was after Harry's name came out of the Cup. Add to it, he's lazy about classes and we felt it advisable to exclude him altogether. Our class schedule is going to be intense enough without having to drag him along kicking and screaming."

"I thought you and Harry were friends with..." McGonagall began.

"After he turned his back on Harry?" Hermione replied. "Neither of us trust him. That's not to say he can't ever be trusted again, but he's got a lot to make up for in the meantime. Neither of us understand why Ron was Harry's hostage in the Second Task considering Harry and I already had feelings for each other even if we were afraid to admit it. Ron's apology after the First Task was cancelled out by his behavior at the Yule Ball. He pretty much ruined that night for several people."

"I'm sorry to hear that," McGonagall began.

Hermione shrugged. "He's probably the most immature boy in our year, certainly in Gryffindor. He has potential I think. But until he grows up he's an annoying pain. And it was Ginny's idea to exclude him. He acted like a git to her at the Ball, and to Neville as well."

"And to you," Daphne said, "and Victor and Fleur, and Harry, Parvati and his own date Padma, and Draco ... but at least he deserved it, and..."

"You weren't even there," David Greengrass said.

"Daddy, I admit as much. But I hear all," Daphne said mysteriously.

Her little sister giggled.

"Not gonna deny it," Hermione said. "Ron was a right git!"

"Oi! Talking 'bout Ickle-ronniekins?" one of the Twins asked.

"Context please," the other said. "You look up GIT in the dictionary and his picture is there for pathetic."

"Malfoy's there for born to it," the first said.

"So, which GIT DAY are we talking about?" the other said.

"Yule Ball," Hermione and Daphne replied in unison.

"He spiked the Git Meter that day," the first said.

"Right off the charts," the second replied.

"Set a new standard for Git-ness!"

"Didn't even have to break a heart to do it."

"Then again, dear brother, it's not like many hearts are his to break."

"Boys!" Ginny called out before her father could, "enough! Ron's a git, we get it!"

"Awwh, come on Little Gin," one said.

"He's a major git," the other replied.

"Though Percy is pushing massive git potential," the first said.

"Might even make the git Hall of Fame before he's twenty."

"Only a few months to go."

"More worried 'bout cauldron bottoms and such to enjoy the finer things in life."

"He is indeed, brother. It's one thing to be clueless and another to try."

"I do pity poor Penelope."

"As do I. At least we try to make our young ladies feel like they are all there is in life."

"We do indeed. As does young Longbottom - good on you Mate!"

Neville blushed.

"And I'm sure, brother of mine, so does our almost brother Harry."

"He does indeed! The two of them snagged a fair few of the pretty ones."

"But not the prettiest!"

"No indeed. Those two were reserved for you and me, brother!"

"Reserved?" Angelina started.

"You'd better do better than that!" Alicia finished.

"Um..." one of them began.

"We managed to win the hearts of the two prettiest..."

"And most spectacularly, drop dead gorgeous girls who ever set foot in this school."

"And I got the best of the two," one said to Alicia.

"Speak for yourself! I got the best!" the other said to Angelina.

"It's a wonder you can tell them apart," Mr. Bell said.

"If you pay attention long enough, you will learn the very subtle differences between them," Alicia said. "They're voices are slightly different..."

"That's 'cause Fred talks too much," Angelina added.

"Too true," George said. "I'm the brains of this operation. Fred is the front man."

"Don't let him fool you," Alicia said. "And don't let their OWLs fool you either. They're both scary smart. They were probably at or beyond NEWTs in many things by the end of Fourth Year."

"Except Defense," George said.

"It's the one OWL we have in common between us," Fred added. "My other two are in Potions and Ancient Runes."

"Mine are in Charms and Transfiguration."

"We split them up to spare the teachers we like..."

"And neither of us can stand Snape. We alternate taking his class, although Fred is the one who sits for the exams."



"Only three OWLs?" Mrs. Bell asked.

"We felt our time was better served in market research," George said.

"Were it not for the fact we have to be seventeen to open a shop," Fred began.

"And we also need money to do so," George added.

"We wouldn't be here at all."

"Well, there's that. And there's our Mum to consider."

"She'd have a cow if we up and left school without any NEWTs..."

"Or Galleons in our pockets."

"It'll be bad enough for her when she finds out neither of us have any desire to work for the Ministry of Mistakes," Fred said.

"Then again, with Ginny and Harry ruining her little marriage plans..."

"She might not notice if we ditched our last year of school..."

"But we won't, tempting as it may be," George said. "In addition to Hogwarts being fertile ground for market research..."

"And the need to make some money so we can start our business..."

"And the fact that Gryffindor would be short two stellar Beaters next year if we left..."

"We're not about to leave these two lovelies by themselves," Fred said.

"While we do trust them..."

"We don't trust the rest of the male student population."

"Neville and Harry being excepted," George added.

"And why are they the exception?" Alicia asked.

"Nine wives already," Fred said. "Doubt they're in the market for more."

"Definitely not," Katie said.

"Besides," Fred said, "everyone knows that even cats can only have nine wives."

"That's lives," Alicia said.

"Really?" Fred asked innocently. "That's what we get for not taking Care of Magical Creatures, I suppose."

"Not like we're planning on opening a pet shop," George added.

"Just what are you two planning to do," Mr. Bell asked.

"Planning?" George asked.

"Doing, more like," Fred said.

"We're calling it Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes."

"The finest joking and pranking materials money can buy..."

"But at affordable prices."

"Running it out of Gryffindor tower and by mail order for now," Fred said.

"Small scale, but highly profitable," George said. "We hope to have made enough to inquire into a premises either in Diagon Alley or Hogsmeade by the end of next year."

"Preferably Diagon Alley," Fred said.

"Why is that preferable?" Mr. Bell asked.

"There's already a joke shop in Hogsmeade," Fred replied.

"And it's not like the place is crawling with shoppers all the time," George added. "Most of Zonko's business is mail order."

"They only get busy during Hogsmeade weekends..."

"And there're only eight of them a year."

"In Diagon Alley, we won't get the students 'cept during the Holidays, but there's a steady stream of shoppers year round," Fred said.

"And we can get the younger kids and adults," George added.

"Isn't there a joke shop there as well?" Katie asked.

"Not like Zonko's," Fred said.

"Gambol and Japes sells joke stuff," George explained, "but it's really a toy store that has jokes stuff. Even then, what they have isn't up to our standards."

"Or Zonko's."

"Filch doesn't have a blanket ban on anything from Gambol and Japes."

"But he does on anything from Zonko's," Fred said. "If Zonko's sold regular bog rolls, Filch would probably ban it."

"That is our goal in life," George said.

"A blanket ban on our products by Filch!"

"How can being banned be a goal?" Mr. Bell asked.

"The notoriety," Fred said.

"And it's good for business," George added.

"Good for business?" Mr. Bell asked confused.

"This is Hogwarts," Fred said.

"The best way to ensure a student buys something is to make it prohibited," George said, "provided it's not really illegal."

"By our estimate, roughly half the students shop at Zonko's in Hogsmeade every Hogsmeade weekend."

"It'd be more than half if First and Second Years were allowed out."

"Filch has banned any Zonko's product," Fred said.

"And yet after every Hogsmeade Weekend, this place is filled with them."

"Filch catches some students bringing the stuff in..."

"Usually the Third Years."

"But most of the stuff makes it into the castle."

"Wouldn't that argue for a Hogsmeade premises?" Katie asked.

"It does," George said.

"And it does not. While Filch may catch a student with the stuff returning to the castle, he lacks any authority to search the mail."

"We would meet the continuing needs of our loyal Hogwarts customers by mail orders."

"Forms will be included in every shopping bag," Fred said.

"And a catalog of our products."

"Once we have enough products to warrant our own catalog."

"Of course, all of that seems to be a few years down the road," George said.

"Oh?" Mr. Bell replied. "It seems to me like you already have a very good idea as to what you can do."

The twins nodded. "We've made about fifty-eight Galleons profit since we got to Hogwarts this year," George said.

"It's not too bad all things considered," Fred agreed, "but it's a long way from really going into business."

"We figure we need at least 600 Galleons to make a real go of it," George said.

"Most of that would be for a premises," Fred continued. "Year's rent in Diagon Alley can be as low as 450 Galleons. The rest would give us our initial supplies."

"After that, it's up to the customers to keep us in business."

"But until we have that, all we can hope to do is mail order."

"Almost had it too," George said.

"Oh?" the Bells asked. Even Angelina and Alicia seemed interested in where this was going.

"Quidditch World Cup," Fred said. "We made a wager."

"Thirty-seven, fifteen and three," George continued. The Bells knew this was Wizarding shorthand for Thirty-seven Galleons, Fifteen Sickles and three Knuts. "We bet that Ireland would win but Victor Krum..."

"The Bulgarian Seeker..."

"Who's in this very room..."

"Would catch the snitch, which is what happened."

"Got good odds too," George said.

"Twenty to one," Fred added. "It would have been more than enough, but..."

"The man paid the bet off in Leprechaun Gold."

"It disappeared after about an hour."

"The man refuses to talk to us."

"Thirty-seven, fifteen and three may not seem like much," Fred said.

"But it's a lot more than nothing, which is what we were left with.

"Who would do such a thing?" Alicia asked.

"Ludo Bagman," George said.

"You mean the one from the Tournament?" Katie asked. When the twins nodded, she explained. "He's Head of the Department of Magical Games and Sports at the Ministry and is one of the organizers and Judges for the Tri-wizard tournament."

"That one," Fred said in disgust.

"Makes you wonder," George said.

"Indeed," Fred agreed.

"If he's the type to steal from an underage wizard," George began.

"Or cheat them..."

"Or at least stiff them on the small amount they wagered..."

"Then one must wonder if anything about the Tournament is on the up and up," Fred finished.

"Given that Harry was entered against his will," Katie said, "I'd say nothing about this tournament is fair."

## THE SOUTH WING - TIME COMPRESSION DAY 2.

The previous day had gone surprisingly well for Harry. He had not been hexed, hit, killed or even yelled at. The worst he had to endure were some very disappointed or disagreeing stares. Hermione's plan for dealing with the adults had seemed to have worked for the most part. True, even in his most unrealistic fantasies, Harry had not expected to be welcomed into the families after just a few hours, but it seemed he was much further along in that regard than he could have imagined.

Hermione's plan was to tell all as honestly as possible with as much documentation and evidence as possible. Part one of the plan was to tell about why they did everything: why they confiscated the South Wing and renovated it and ultimately why they all entered into underage, Plural Marriages, although the marriage bit was left for the end aside from Harry, Hermione and Hannah and Neville, Ginny and Susan. The why was all about Voldemort and Albus Dumbledore. Oddly, no one argued that Voldemort could not possibly be alive. There was a reason why he was still referred to as "You-Know-Who" and a host of other monikers other than the name he chose for himself. Few knew his real name. Only two in the room seemed to stand up for Dumbledore: McGonagall and Arthur Weasley. McGonagall, however, kept silent once it was clear the allegations included Harry's life with the Dursleys, which was spelled out in disturbing detail. She remembered she had strenuously - and to no avail - argued with Dumbledore about that placement at the time and never felt right about not doing more for Harry. Arthur kept insisting there had to be a reasonable explanation, given how important and busy Dumbledore was.

The counter argument and further revelations shut him down as well. Basically, by assuming the role as magical guardian, Dumbledore was legally responsible for seeing to Harry's well being both at school and when he was away from school. The Dursleys had received a thousand Pounds a month which was supposed to be used for Harry's care and education, an amount more than many Muggle families earned. Harry's treatment was criminal and punishable in the Muggle World and Dumbledore should have put a stop to it or made arrangements such that it would not have occurred. Would Arthur have done that to a child? Would Arthur have allowed a child to be used as slave labor? Would he have locked the child in a cupboard under a stair for ten years and a small

bedroom the last three with bars on the windows, multiple locks on the door and a cat flap to pass food in and bodily wastes out (in the worst cases)? Would he have kept the thousand pounds a month for himself and spend as little as possible on the child for whom the money was meant? If he did not have physical custody of the child, would he allow the ones that did to behave in such a way? After all, they were Muggles who knew about magic. Magic could have been used to modify their behavior quite legally. If Dumbledore could not invest the time necessary to see to it that Harry was raised at least somewhat decently, he should either never have assumed the role as magical guardian or delegated some of the role to someone trustworthy who had the time to keep an eye on things. Add in the fact there were others who should have and could have served in that role and the inexplicable incarceration of Sirius Black for twelve years without any review of his case and by the end of the day, Arthur Weasley's faith in Dumbledore was shattered.

The "what" was to get Harry and Neville out from under Dumbledore's control and trained proper to deal with Voldemort and his followers should they return. No one wanted this and all hoped it would never happen, but at least most agreed it would be better to assume and prepare for if it did happen than to hope it never happened and be faced with the nightmare again totally unprepared. Most of the adults understood the real problem. Harry was underage. Until he was seventeen, there was little he could do. Then Hermione revealed the marriage contract Dumbledore had entered into on Harry's behalf with the Weasleys. Arthur seemed to have forgotten about it, which everyone agreed was odd. According to Hermione and later Arthur himself, he would never have locked his daughter in that way. Certainly not when she was only a few months old. Arthur expressed the opinion that he must have been quite inebriated to have signed that contract, or else there had been a compulsion charm on it or he had been obliviated.

Hermione then explained why they thought Dumbledore did that. She showed them the prophecy and explained what they thought it meant, what they thought Voldemort thought it meant, and what they thought Dumbledore thought it meant. As for Dumbledore, they thought he believed Harry had to die and probably die young and the contract was to ensure House Potter did not die with him. It was a prudent measure, but one predicated on the assumption the prophecy meant Harry had to die, which was contrary to its plain language and probable meanings. It was further evidence that



Dumbledore could not be relied upon when it came to the prophecy and whomever the One was, as it could still apply to Neville as well.

It was the "how" that worried Harry. The Muggle parents would take issue with the notion of Plural marriage. All arguments aside, such marriages had not existed in the British Isles in well over a thousand years, at least in the Muggle world. Christianity had seen to that. The fact that some Muggles were unfaithful to their spouses, even to the point of carrying on an affair for years or even decades or divorced and remarried many times did not change the fact that law and custom forbade multiple wives. Plural marriages were rare even in the magical world. Harry and Neville's families were currently the only ones in Britain. Still, they were not looked upon the same way and Harry knew Hermione had already set the stage when she introduced the notion of Line Continuation Contracts. Given that the magicals knew that Harry and Neville were the last of their Houses as well, those contracts all but mandated a Plural marriage for each of them.

Still, Harry and Neville were underage, as were the four girls up on the stage and as were all the others whose involvement had not been mentioned when Harry left the ballroom. The parents would know it would be impossible for them to be married without the consent of their parents and guardians and the magicals would know that in their world the children had to be sixteen. In the case of Harry's family and if one went based upon birthdates, only Marcia was sixteen. Rosie was only thirteen and the rest, including Harry, were between fourteen and fifteen. In the case of Neville's family, Ginny was only thirteen and only Lucinda was sixteen, by about five days. Laura would be in a little over a month, but that did not matter. If one took their prior Time Compression into account, many were still too young. For Harry, with Time Compression, Marcia was legal at seventeen. But Rosie was still only fourteen and Gabrielle, Luna and Harry were only fifteen. For Neville, Lucinda was seventeen and Susan, Michelle, Laura and Parvati were sixteen. But Ginny was still only fourteen and the rest were only fifteen. Not that it mattered because the law did not recognize age modification.

Harry knew the real issue was the obscure law that allowed them to marry so young and without obtaining permission. Muggle or magical, he doubted any of the adults would be thrilled that the young witches were all pregnant. The fact that he and Neville were quite capable of supporting their wives and children did not make up

for the fact that they were still very young. Harry knew that magicals tended to marry young as compared to Muggles. Very young marriages were almost all arranged affairs and almost exclusively between Purebloods and Slytherins and almost always those students married after Sixth Year. Even then, Harry had been told, there had been only one such couple since they had been in school and that was First Year. It was not common.

Harry knew the other real issue was not that the girls were sexually active. They were at a co-educational boarding school. Ten months of the year, four hundred boys and girls lived in the same Castle with little real close supervision and plenty of obscure places for couples to get together. The main reason why Prefects patrolled the school at night was to discourage it, but it was still far from uncommon. While it was almost unheard of for a student to be sexually active in their first two years and rare in third, it was less so in Fourth or Fifth Years and rare that they were not so as Sixth and Seventh Years. Yet there had not been a teenage pregnancy at school or involving a student in almost two hundred years thanks to contraceptive potions. Harry now knew that girls raised in the magical world were on these potions from the date of their first period or eleventh birthday, whichever was sooner and Muggle Born girls were on it from the moment they started Hogwarts and all parents knew this. The potions were to prevent exactly what Harry and the others had done and the parents would realize this was no accident. They had deliberately and intentionally taken advantage of a law that was still on the books but which had been made all but irrelevant with the invention and all but mandatory use of the contraceptive potion. The reason for this second Time Compression was to prevent anyone from interfering with what they had done.

That old law could be repealed and probably would be once word about this got out - and regardless of anything else it would get out. Luna's Dad, while surprisingly supportive, wanted to do a series of stories about this for the Quibbler. If they had not set upon this second Time Compression, the law would be repealed very quickly, probably within days of Dumbledore learning about it. With the laws repealed, the pregnancies could be terminated at the request of the girls' parents or under Dumbledore's authority as Headmaster. While abortion was exceedingly rare in the magical world (again since the invention of the contraceptive potion) it was not illegal and the law could be repealed in such a way so as to reverse the legal emancipations. In fact, this had been known to happen even under

the old law. If the supposed young wife miscarried (or was forced to have an abortion), that law allowed the marriage to be annulled and along with it any emancipations. But until the law was repealed, Harry and the others were legal adults and could refuse to cooperate in any effort to change what had happened. Once the children were two or three months old biologically, even if Dumbledore or others repealed the law, it would be too late to undo what they had done. With magical children and magical parents, a bond would form by then, one which no one in the magical world would support breaking - except someone like Voldemort.

Amelia Bones and Augusta Longbottom had recognized this the first night. They saw this as a deliberate plan designed to ensure the marriages and emancipations resulting from those marriages could not be overturned. What surprised Harry was neither of them seemed too upset about this. Amelia's daughter was, after all, under a Line Continuation Contract and given the circumstances would have wound up as Neville's wife as part of a Plural Marriage in any event. Augusta was well aware of that contract, but was more encouraged by her grandson's recent improvements as a wizard. She had always hoped he would be special in that regard and now he was and if it took nine wives to bring out what she had always believed was beneath the surface, so be it.

For Harry, his biggest supporter the night before had been Hannah's mother. Again, it was probably due to the Contract and she seemed thrilled that House Abbott would not die off. She had been the one magical other than Hermione who tried to convince the Grangers that this was really for the best for all concerned. It seemed Sirius, Remus and the Tonks were too stunned to say anything to the Grangers about this. The Grangers, on the other hand, while holding their tongues were clearly not in any mood to be supportive of any of this.

The Grangers seemed changed now. Harry would not say that they were welcoming him with open arms, but they seemed accepting of what was going on. Oddly, they seemed to become more so as they met the other families now tied to House Potter by the Plural Marriage. Harry could swear that they had both smiled at him on at least a couple of occasions, a far cry from being loathed as he had feared.

Luna's Dad had been supportive from the moment they were introduced. Then again, Luna had warned Harry that Xenophilus Lovegood had always been odd and more so since her mother died. Xeno, as he preferred to be called, told Harry privately he had to support the boy who was the reason his little girl smiled and laughed again. He had seen far too little of that in recent years. The Delacours were also surprisingly supportive, if one discounted Fleur who seemed a bit put out that her little sister found her Bondmate first. Then again, Veela are different in that way and the parents were relieved that he had not rejected the bond as he could have.

Harry was also surprised at the Greengrass and Rosier parents. After all, they and their daughters were Slytherins and he was a Gryffindor. But they were also old Pureblood families, despite their practice of marrying abroad. Both families had been approached "by the wrong sort" meaning Death Eater families about marriage contracts. This had taken their daughters off the market and removed that leverage from families they would rather not associate with. David Greengrass told Harry it probably would have the same effect for Astoria who was only twelve. From the former Death Eater perspective, her older sister's choice tainted her which, in reality, freed her and her family to marry as she chose one day.

Harry met the Bells and Robbins for the first time after dinner in the large Common Room of his House Apartments. Harry had seen the Bells at dinner, but not the Robbins who elected to eat in Marcia's private apartment. The Bells seemed surprisingly pleasant. Then again, they told him Katie seemed very happy despite the unusual circumstances and that was all they really wanted for their children. Of course, the fact that money and her blood status were no longer an issue didn't hurt. The Robbins were also surprisingly friendly. Their only reason concern seemed to be how this all would work (Harry told them Hermione had worked that out for now) and whether their daughter would continue as a Prefect for that was an honor. Fortunately, that concern was put to rest when Professors Sprout and McGonagall stopped by to "inspect" their students' new quarters. They were told only the Head of House or Headmaster could remove a Prefect and even then both had to be in agreement and there had been female prefects with young children, even if it had been a couple hundred years ago. So long as Marcia was able to perform her duties, this would have no bearing on her status.

"Besides," McGonagall said, "I do have significant say on who becomes Prefect in my House. Professor Dumbledore has suggested Mr. Weasley, after all that family has produced two Head Boys, but his marks and attitude suggest he's a bad fit. My suggestions would have been you or Mr. Longbottom due to your marks in general and I discount Potions. Mr. Longbottom is top of the class in Herbology as are you in Defense. The only thing weighing more in Mr. Longbottom's favor is your detention record - again ignoring any assigned by Professor Snape. My choice for female Prefect would be Ms Granger. If forced, my second is Ms. Patil. The other two girls don't have the marks and the only other boy who does is Mr. Thomas, but he does not inspire confidence. As my choices for next year are all involved in this and as I really don't see any of the others standing out in any way, I will not change my mind simply because of this."

Harry had not seen Padma or the Patils last night nor at breakfast in the Main Dining Room. He knew they could not have left for no one could until Time Compression lifted. He now knew they were certainly still here as Padma and Parvati were down in the Infirmary after Breakfast as were all the wives for their first check-up with the new healing staff, but aside from that he had no idea where they were and according to his other girls, neither had said anything.

Harry was out on his balcony enjoying the day. Hermione had been dragged off to her apartment by her mother to begin their wedding planning with Winky. For that matter, so had Hannah and Katie. Luna apparently had left such details to her new elves Carla and Rudolph, as she had named them. She said they looked like a Carla and Rudolph and the elves did not seem to mind. So Luna was present on the balcony as well along with her father who had been briefly scandalized by her attire. She was wearing a pink bikini. Harry refrained from telling him that Luna was wearing far more than usual.

Gabrielle was also on the balcony as were her parents and Fleur. The two young Veela were also in bikinis and their parents were not scandalized. Then again, topless sunbathing was common in France even among the magicals so bikini tops was almost conservative attire. Harry had been told his balcony was probably the best place for Fleur to do this as there was less chance of her allure attracting unwanted attention.

Marcia was there as well with her mother. Daphne, and Rosie were present, also in bikinis, as was Rosie's mother, Daphne's mother and younger sister Astoria who were not so attired and seemed even more scandalized than Mr. Lovegood. Aside from Luna's father, the other "men folk" were down checking out the recreation room and, according to Marcia, talking to Dobby about golf - or at least the Muggle men were. Harry spent several minutes chatting with Marcia's mother who was asking him all sorts of questions about the jewelry he had bought and, more importantly, where he had bought it.

"Hello Harry," two female voices said in unison. Harry looked up and saw Padma and Parvati and a woman he guessed was their mother. They were not wearing bikinis. Harry stood and kissed Padma then hugged her sister.

"This is Mrs. Robbins," he said introducing the woman he was sitting with as Marcia was lying on a lounge nearby trying to ignore everything but the sun. "Marcia's Mum," he added. "Mrs. Robbins? This is Padma, my - er - final wife or at least the last you've met and her sister Parvati who's Neville's wife and I'm certain their mother."

"Sira," the woman said. "It is a pleasure to finally meet you, Harry Potter. Both my daughters have told me a lot about you, although I am surprised you married Padma and not Parvati. Did you not take Parvati to the ball?"

"I did," Harry said. "As a friend and I enjoyed our time together until..."

"Yes," Sira Patil said, "I have heard at length about the red haired one. Still, I would have expected..."

"You two didn't tell her?" Harry asked.

"We've been too involved with our so called father," Parvati said.

"Oh? And where is he?"

"Grounded," Padma chuckled.

"Grounded?"

"He's in his room," Sira said, "and cannot leave until and unless Padma and Parvati's House Elves let him, which will be when he gets his wand back and promises - probably by wizard's oath - to behave like a gentleman and not a petulant child. If he must remain so confined for fifteen months, so be it!"

"Oh?"

"Again, why Padma and not Parvati?" Sira asked. "Did they trick you?"

"Have a seat," Harry said. Once the Patils joined him at the table he continued. "The lot of them tricked Neville and me. Before all of this, Hermione was my Best Friend and I knew Katie, Parvati and Ginny pretty well. None of them could be considered my girlfriend even though I took Parvati to the ball. I knew Susan, Hannah, Padma, Daphne and Tracey by name only because we had classes together and the same was true for Marcia, Laura and Lucinda, although in their cases it was because they're Prefects and nothing else. Gabrielle I rescued from the lake, but I knew her sister Fleur better. And yet here we are. These girls banded together to help Hermione help me with this blasted tournament and learned far more about what was really going on than I think anyone wanted them to learn and..."

"You didn't know Marcia at all?" Mrs. Robbins asked.

"I told you that, Mum," Marcia said.

"Yes. Well I thought you were just trying to get under our skins about this, young lady!"

"I know her now," Harry began.

"Obviously! She's carrying your child!"

"I didn't mean like that exclusively," Harry defended himself. "We spent a month together and that month included getting to know Marcia as a person. The same is true for all the others except Hermione and Katie who I already knew pretty well. I have no regrets about any of them. They're all very different people, but all of them are ... I enjoy their company. I already loved Hermione and liked Katie, but I can now honestly say I love them all."

"As do we," Marcia said, "even though we didn't really know you well either."

"The one thing they all have in common is they don't see me as The Boy Who Lived. Most girls here - most people here do and I really have issues with that. I showed up here not knowing a thing about this world and find out from the start I'm famous - famous for somehow surviving an attack that killed my parents and that I have no real memory of." Harry did not count dementor induced memories as a memory. "Each of the young women involved in this never saw that. If they find me impressive, it's for what I've done since I arrived here, not for what I supposedly did as a baby or what the press claims I've done. Now that I'm emancipated, one of the first things I want to do is get my due! A lot of authors and publishers made a fortune off of that Boy-Who-Lived rubbish. Did I see so much as a knut? No! But I can't walk down the street without being hounded for autographs or at least stared at. I feel like I'm a one man Royal family!"

"Not a rock star?" Marcia teased.

"Rock stars chose that life, they weren't born to it. Not that I was, but it seems like it sometimes especially because I don't want it and never have! I now have - not that I saw it coming - nine incredibly beautiful, loving and smart wives not one of whom will let things go to my head, not that it's happened, but if it ever does, I am seriously outnumbered here. Had I married one of the many Fan Girls ... Ugh! Don't even want to think about it! I wanted nothing to do with this blasted tournament and yet I find myself in it! Even some of my so called friends - none of whom are involved with why we are here - think I entered and did so 'cause I want even more fame! I don't want any fame at all! Maybe the other Champions want their faces splashed all over the papers. As far as I'm concerned, unless I really choose to do something impressive, I would have preferred to appear in the papers only for my birth announcement, finishing school, getting married and snuffing it!"

"I can assure you I did not enter for ze eternal fame and glory, 'Arry," a voice said. Harry turned and saw Fleur, Gabrielle and their parents as well as others. He had drawn a crowd.



"No! You entered because you are full of yourself!" Gabrielle said in French.

"I most certainly did not!"

"Did too and you know it!"

"Did not!"

"Did too!"

"Hush!" Apolline Delacour interjected, "now is not the time for your incessant bickering!"

Harry chuckled.

"What's so funny?" Mrs. Robbins asked.

"The fact that Gabrielle has taught me enough French that I understood all that," Harry laughed. "So, Fleur, if you didn't enter 'cause your full of yourself as Gabrielle said, why did you?"

Fleur actually blushed. "I see she 'as taught you well. I entered because I was told to by Madam Maxine, as did all who entered from Beauxbatons. We were told we 'ad to because we are old enough and at the top of our year and zis was for the honor of France and Beauxbatons. I compete for such honor, and for the honor of Veela and hope we earn respect and acceptance through my competing. Like you, 'Arry, ze press is not my wish."

"I still say you are full of yourself!" Gabrielle said. "I do love my sister dearly, Harry, but she is still full of herself."

"Enough!" her mother shot back. "Can you not go a day without this?"

"I think I'll leave that one between us," Harry chuckled.

"This does not explain why you chose on of my girls over the other," Sira said. "Are they not the same to you?"

"They are very different," Harry said. "I can tell them apart quite easily. That being said, I did not so much as choose Padma as she

chose me, just as all the others chose me and not the other way around. That being said, I'm told when this came up, they could only decide on one thing for certain. They did not want to share the same husband for, as I understand, that is what their father wanted."

Sira sighed. "I never wanted that for them."

"They couldn't decide between themselves who would choose me and who Neville so they drew lots. Parvati went with Neville and Padma came to me. If you ask me, it worked out quite well for all of us."

"I agree," Padma and Parvati said in unison.

"Harry is a complex person," Padma said. "I find him - fascinating."

"And my Neville does not have his own bed in the Hospital Wing," Parvati added. "Harry had spent far too much time there over the years what between Quidditch and his other misadventures."

"Thanks Parvati," Harry grumbled.

"It's true," she said.

"Doesn't mean I'm proud of it. While I've actually come to like Madam Pomfrey, that does not mean I want to see her hovering over me ever again. If Snape was not reason enough to hate Potions, Madam Pomfrey is! Gah! Nasty stuff even if they do work!"

"I can't believe you drew lots to choose your husbands," Sira said glaring at her daughters.

"Beats the way Daddy did," Parvati shot back. "We were sold off as part of a business deal!"

"One which is now destroyed, or so he claims," Padma added. "We were to join a real Harem as ... as slaves for lack of a better word for it! As far as Parv and I our concerned, he can dig ditches for that without a wand!"

"Business deal?" Mrs. Robbins asked.

"We were born in India," Parvati said. "As backward as many of the non-magicals from here say magical Britain is, it's almost progressive compared to Magical India..."

"But at least India isn't fixated on Blood status," Padma added. "Magic is magic, there..."

"But witches are even lower in that society than here. Sons inherit there. Daughters are often sold off as wives or concubines for harems..."

"Think bordello and you're not far off the mark! While as Harem girls we are technically his wives and could bear his heir..."

"Our so called betrothed already as sixteen male heirs," Parvati said in disgust. "He's older than Daddy which means..."

"We are to - er - service his business associates!"

"That's horrible!" several voices said.

"Identical twin girls are a commodity there," Padma said. "Daddy sold us for the money to set up his businesses here when we were very young."

"I didn't approve," Sira said. "Never have! My family was not that way, his was. He cares little for his own daughters' happiness, or so it seemed. Had I had a son, he probably still would not care, but I didn't. The truth is he did it to get us out of India and somewhere where he could make a decent living for us, but the damnable contract was all but ironclad and now that his girls have done this, he worries his business contacts in India will stop supplying him! The man who wants our daughters is my husband's primary if not exclusive supplier from India, although my husband refuses to acknowledge that our Indian products are but a small fraction of our business and not a particularly successful or profitable one. The man who made the contract said one thing at the time and something very different recently. My husband did not expect him to demand compliance. But the man has and can hurt us financially if he's not satisfied! He ruined my husband's brothers years ago and my husband is certain we're next if we don't..."

"Our father told us," Padma said, "we should lose the children we carry and annul the marriage so we can go to his India contract unsullied, as he put it. It was not expected we remained virgins, but to have a child?"

"That would be unthinkable," Parvati said. "We chose this life with you and Neville for several reasons and we choose to be sullied, as Father says. You and Neville were our firsts - and no, I have not been with Harry nor Padma with Neville! You will be our only as well! Father would have it another way!"

"He threatened to beat our children out of us," Padma said.

"That was when we had to act," Sira said. "He has never raised his voice, much less a hand to our daughters before, but he fears this is a matter of honor. We left India during a period of political turmoil in that magical world. We had little money, certainly not nearly enough to come here and set up business. So my husband entered into that contract with a business associate of his - and not a reputable one at that. For the contract, we received enough money to move here and start our own business and my husband was quite successful. He could easily repay the man in India with even very high interest, but he insists his honor had been compromised by all of this and the only option is to undo it."

"The elves stuck him to the wall where he remains until his attitude changes," Parvati said. "We may be part of a Plural Marriage, but we are not Harem Girls! We are not to be used as entertainments for business associates or however you describe those who pay for sex or accept it as part of a business deal!"

"You're going to leave him stuck to the wall?" Harry asked in surprise.

"For a few hours," Sira said. "Or until he needs to come down. After that, he will be stuck in that room until he accepts all this."

"Hopefully, he'll come to his senses and stop threatening to harm us or you within the next two weeks," Padma said.

"Two weeks?" Harry asked.

"Surely Hermione showed you the schedule," Parvati said.

Harry nodded. "Not that I memorized it."

"Day 17," Padma said. "We're already married but it's our wedding day."

"Neville and mine as well," Parvati said. "A double wedding. It'll be wonderful," she gushed.

"It'll be even better if Daddy comes around and agrees to escort us down the aisle," Padma said with a slight frown.

"I hope he does," Harry said. "But if not, Sirius has agreed to do that for Hannah and apparently Professor Lupin has agreed to do that for Susan. I'm sure they would both be honored if you asked."

"It's more leverage with your father," Sira said.

"Can I take that as you're not upset about what has happened between me and your daughter Padma, Mrs. Patil?" Harry asked.

"I will not say I'm not upset about your ages, Mr. Potter - or can I call you Harry?"

"H-Harry's fine."

"But you and Mr. Longbottom, who I have not yet met, saved my girls from a terrible fate in my view - even if you are still young in my eyes. Then again, they are my girls and you will always seem young to me," she shrugged. "You do realize the - um - curse of my line?"

"Twin daughters to start?"

Sira nodded. "This does not bother you?"

Harry shrugged. "My Gabrielle is Veela. She can only bear daughters and yet I don't mind a bit - provided they are almost as pretty as she is."

"Merci, mom cheri," Gabrielle said. "You said they."

"I've no real reason to limit you or any of you," he said looking at the others. "Money seems to be a non issue and - well there's plenty of

room here. So no, Mrs. Patil, twin girls do not scare me. Twin boys, on the other hand ..."

"What do you got against twin boys," a voice called. It was one of the Weasley twins - Fred by Harry's estimation since Alicia was on his arm. While Fred had taken Angelina to the Yule Ball (and George Alicia) in certain circles it was already known who was with who. Their dates were part of a master prank, and their dates were in on it. It would have been a huge scandal when they switched dates, but Ron ruined their plans by out scandalizing a well thought master prank.

"Well, Harry my lad," George said, "what do you have against twin boys?"

"N-nothing," Harry said. "Then again, twin girls are easier on the eyes and dateable ... unless I swung that way, which I don't."

"That's..." Fred said.

"So..."

"Wrong!" the two said in unison.

"What?" Harry asked. "That I don't swing that way?"

"I take it back," Fred said. "I'd rather you not look at me as a piece of meat."

"Is that what you think of me?" Alicia chided.

"N-no! Course not! Our little Harrykins might deem nine a lucky number, but one is my lucky number!"

"Mine as well," George said.

"Nice save," Angelina quipped.

"So what brings you to my lair?" Harry asked.

"Having seen your rec room," Fred began.

"And having our asses handed to us in darts and pocket billiards by your father-in-law Mr. Granger..." George continued.

"And others," Fred finished.

"We decided to pay our respects upon our lovely little sister."

"And her new hubby, who we've always liked, mind you."

"Hence no hexing was involved."

"Then we saw her bathing costume," Fred said.

"As lovely as they look on others," George said.

"Seeing our little Sis in one of those Bike-en-knees..."

"They're called bikinis," Alicia said, "and if you EVER want to see me in one, Fred Weasley, you'll remember that!"

"Yes dear," Fred said shamefully.

"Nomenclature aside," George said, "seeing our little sis in one fell into the too much information category!"

"Never knew she had jigglies," Fred said, "and to be honest never wanted to either."

"So you came down here to perv on my wives and their mothers - and sisters for that matter?" Harry asked glancing at Fleur and Astoria Greengrass, although the latter was still a bit young for that.

"We are perfect gentlemen," Fred said.

"When we choose to be," George added.

"And when escorting the most beautiful women in this place," Fred added.

"And when knowing we can, even if our lovelies are not around."

"Good call," Alicia said.

"Just don't want to know 'bout little Gin-Gin's jigglies," Fred said.

"Besides, Harry's always loads of fun to hang with!"

"Teammates and all! Speaking of teammates, where's the lovely, if no longer available Katie?"

"I'm told she's with her Mum," Harry said, "as are Hermione and Hannah. They're planning the weddings."

"I'm leaving those details to my elves," Luna said. "It seems like a lot of work to me and as they're doing it, why should I interfere?"

"What's to plan?" Fred asked. He got smacked by Alicia for that.

"There's all sorts of details, Fred," she said. "Okay, we can skip the guest list, but there's still the dress..."

"Already got those," Daphne said. "Bought them the other day."

"We all did," Padma added.

"You did?" Sira asked. "You do realize your dress and your bridesmaid's dresses define the wedding?"

"Which is why you're here mother," Parvati added. "We have the dresses, it's just about the other details."

"What other details?" Fred asked.

"The cake," Daphne said. "And the decorations and flowers for the wedding space and the reception. Then there's the menu for the dinner and the music and ..."

"And the theme, if there is one," Alicia said.

"Theme?" Harry asked.

"And choosing groomsmen appropriate to the Bridesmaids and such," Daphne added, "seeing as we girls have picked ours already."

"Had to for the dresses," Parvati added.



"I did have to get a magically self sizing one for my sister," Marcia said. "She's gonna be my Maid of Honor."

"I - I am?" a little girl said. Harry remembered her name was Sarah and she was a Second Year in Hufflepuff.

"Well of course," Marica said. "You're too old to be a flower girl, so what else would you be?"

"Fleur shall be mine," Gabrielle said.

"I will?" Fleur replied in French.

"Of course. You are my only sister and ... and you should be."

Fleur's eyes filled with tears. "I would be honored," she said in English.

"I already know I'm my big sister's," Astoria Greengrass said proudly.

"So what's this about themes?" Harry asked.

"Oh, we all picked one," Daphne said. "Certainly for the Bridesmaids and we hope it goes beyond that to an extent. Hermione's is House Unity. Ginny is her Maid or Matron of Honor, and her other Bridesmaids are Padma, Hannah and me - aside from Ginny same year, see?"

Harry nodded. "She placed no restrictions on my choice for Groomsmen."

"So who do you choose?" Daphne asked holding out a quill.

"Assuming they accept," Harry said, "Neville will be Best Man. Then I want Sirius and Remus and ... either of you work," he said looking at Fred and George.

"As long as the other stands alone with you at one point," Fred said.

"We're in!" George replied.

Daphne nodded. "Guess we'll sort it out later. Hannah's is about loyalty. Susan is her Maid of Honor, and Marcia, Andrea and Hermione her other Bridesmaids. Harry?"

"Remus as Best Man. Sirius is escorting her down the Aisle in place of her father so he's out. That leaves ..."

"She'd like Cedric to be one."

"Fine then. Cedric, Neville and the other Weasley twin."

"We're honored!" the two said.

"Katie's is about Quidditch," Daphne continued after making some notes. "Alicia is to be her Maid of Honor, and Angelina, Ginny who is probably going to play soon and Hermione, who's Harry's hugest fan are the others."

"Don't know if she's a fan," Harry said.

"Not of the game," Daphne said. "Just of one player. Now Katie wants Fred and George as Groomsmen and Victor Krum, if he's agreeable."

"Why Victor?"

"Quidditch theme," Daphne said, "and Ollie Wood isn't available. You need a fourth."

"Sirius as Best Man," Harry said. "He played Beater for Gryffindor in his time."

"Wicked!" the Twins said in unison.

"She'd prefer her little brother David," Daphne said, "no offense. He's a huge fan of the game."

Harry nodded. "Fine. It's her brother and her wedding." His voice was not disapproving.

"Luna's is - I don't know - eclectic?" Daphne continued. "Ginny will be her Maid of Honor as she was Luna's first friend and Hermione

will be there as well, and Padma and Lisa. She'd like Professor Flitwick with you Harry."

"Sounds like friends to me," Harry said. "Right then, Neville as Best Man, and Sirius and Professor Lupin as the others."

"Right then," Daphne said, "Padma's next."

"As it's a dual wedding," Padma said, "And Parv is asking Hermione to be her Maid of Honor, mine will be Lisa, with Laura and Luna and Gabrielle as the others."

"Gabrielle?" Fleur asked.

Padma nodded. "She wasn't one yet and she deserves to be. She's going to be Maid of Honor for her friend Michelle. She deserves this as well."

"Groomsmen?" Harry asked.

"Given that Daddy is still on the outs and we'd split Professor Lupin and Sirius between us as escorts," Parvati said, "you need a list. You can deal with that later."

"My choices are as follows," Marcia said. "My sister Sarah as Maid of Honor, and Hannah, Susan and Andrea as the others. Harry?"

"Remus as Best Man, Sirius and Neville and one of the Twins, whichever."

"We'll work the whichever bit out," George said.

"I have Lucinda as my Maid of Honor," Rosie said, "and Ginny, Luna and Andrea as my other Bridesmaids."

"Sirius as Best Man," Harry said, "Neville, Remus and another twin as the others."

"My sister Astoria as Maid of Honor," Daphne said. "Tracy, Rosie and Lucinda as the others as they are my best friends."

Harry nodded. "Neville as Best Man, Sirius, Remus and a Twin as the others."

"Fleur is my Maid of Honor," Gabrielle said. "Michelle, Hermione and Ginny are the others. And I want the other two Champions to stand with us, if it's acceptable."

"Sirius as Best Man," Harry nodded, "Cedric and Victor and Neville as the others."

"It is done then," Daphne said.

"This is," Harry nodded, "for now, obviously. But one last thing. Dobby?"

The elf appeared. "Yes, Great Harry Potter Sir?"

His salutation always amused.

"The last bag, please?" Harry said.

"At once, Sir!" Seconds later he returned with a shopping bag.

"Have you seen Neville yet?" he asked Parvati. She shook her head. "Then in a way I'm about to spoil his surprise, because I have presents here for Padma, and he has similar ones for you."

Padma and Parvati and their mother were most impressed with his presents, although in Parvati's case it was more in anticipation of what she would be getting later.

"Now you've done it," Fred complained.

"Oh?" Harry asked.

"Raised the boyfriend bar to a height we cannot hope to match anytime soon," George added looking at Angelina apologetically.

"But this isn't boyfriend stuff," Harry protested.

"It's not?" the twins asked.

"It's husband stuff!"

## THE SOUTH WING - TIME COMPRESSION DAY 8.

Eighty-Two people were now living in the South Wing of Hogwarts school. They were by choice or by prank all stuck there for another four hundred and forty-two days. Today would be the beginning of the "Wedding Cycle" as Hermione's schedule which everyone had a copy of stated. Days Eight through Fifteen would have a wedding beginning at five in the evening. Day Sixteen would be a day off from such festivities and would allow people to relax a bit. Day Seventeen would be the Patil Wedding, which was beginning to look like it would go as the sisters hoped as their father had relented and was beginning to accept all of this. Day Eighteen would be another day off from weddings before the next rapid round began running from Day Nineteen through Day Twenty-six would complete the cycle ending with Harry's wedding to Gabrielle. They would have one more day off after that before classes began. Hermione had thought the schedule was reasonable when she wrote it out. She now wondered as every day she and the others had two hours of physical training and two hours of magical training in the mornings. But Hermione was stubborn. When she set a schedule, she stuck to it - and so did everyone else. Besides, the Healers with them had said that the training was actually good for expectant mothers - provided they avoided being physically hit or hit by a rather long list of spells.

Three days of rehearsals preceded this. Eighteen girls were having their weddings which, even though the pool of possibilities was small, meant that there were still eighteen sets of bridesmaids and groomsmen who needed to know what to do and this included the two grooms. As Grooms, Harry and Neville had it easy really. They just had to stand up front and take what was coming. But they also were groomsmen and Best Men for each other which meant they had to practice as well. Hermione thought it was a bunch of rubbish. Her mother explained this was not for the Bride and Groom but for family, most particularly in Hermione's case one Rose Granger.

It was not like her Mum could get the guest list she wanted. Time Compression prevented any additions or deletions. There were a total of eighty-two people in this world, and some forty House Elves and that was the list of possibilities for everyone. For Harry, Hermione knew, everyone that truly mattered with the exception of Hagrid was here. One could say the same for Sirius Black, who would play Best Man or groomsman in all but two of the weddings

and in those two he would escort the Bride. The only family he truly counted were here: Harry and his Cousin Andy and her family. Luna too had all she cared about here as did Hannah and Susan. For the rest, there were gaps - although despite many relations, the only one Ginny wished was here was her brother Charlie.

There were people in her family she would not mind being here. She liked her grandparents Mike and Ellen Granger and John and Cathy Carter. She liked her Dad's sister Anna, although Anna's husband Uncle Carl was a pain and their three children were much younger than she was. Justine had just turned twelve and had been all into dolls and things Hermione found boring. Ten year old Cousin Amy was even worse, boasting about her doll collection to any who would listen. Little Drake was eight and ate like Ron Weasley and had many of his mannerisms. Hermione liked her mother's older brother John and his wife Cathy. Their oldest, Jake, was off studying zoology or some such and was the one cousin Hermione could relate to as he was a bit of a bookworm himself. Emma and Jenna were about her age and made Lavender Brown seem bookish. Hermione couldn't stand them for more than a few minutes.

In the end she was grateful. She wished her Grandparents and Aunts and Uncles could be here, but could care less if her cousins were here. And there was the problem of magic. To invite any of them meant revealing the magical world. How else could she and her parents explain both her being married so young and the whole Plural Marriage thing? It would come out soon. Their plan was to spread the word as it were. Statute of Secrecy be damned, she thought. The more who know, the less effective Dumbledore can be in keeping control over Harry and the less effective the Death Eater could be should they go active.

Today, however, was not about the War or Dumbledore or even magic. It was about memories and photographs and dancing with her husband. She put schedules and the rest of the world into a box as it were and relaxed as Winky fussed over her. Hermione stood before a full length mirror looking at her hair, gown and veil. The gown bared her shoulders, but was still elegant and not too revealing. Her hair - it did not even look this good for the ball. She wore her sapphire necklace for the something blue bit. She was only missing old and borrowed when there was a knock at the door to her bedroom.

"Hermione?" she heard her mother ask.

"Come in," Hermione said.

A few moments later she saw her mother in the mirror.

"You look wonderful, my Little One," Rose Granger said.

Hermione blushed, "Thanks Mum," she said.

"She's decent," Rose called out.

Hermione's father entered.

"My word," he gasped. "Still getting used to this, but my word! This can't be my Hermione, can it?"

"Thank you, Daddy," Hermione said giving him a brief hug. "Don't want to get all wrinkled," she said.

"You okay?" Robert Granger asked.

"I'm fine, Daddy."

"You look pale," Robert said.

"I do not! You're just saying that! Daddy, I'm already married and you're not going to scare me away from it, or my husband or this life!"

"Definitely pregnant," Robert chuckled. "She may not be repainting the room, but definitely has the attitude!"

"Robert!" Rose shot out. "This is her day, Robert! While our little girl is married, this is her day! I don't want you ruining it 'cause this is the day that'll be in all of our photo albums!"

"I was just saying," Robert began.

"And for you information," Hermione huffed, "I'm not being hormonal! This is supposed to be my wedding day and you're being annoying!"

The fact that her father was teasing her was a good sign as it seemed to mean that he was accepting of all of this.

"For your information," Hermione said, "while I'm sure my hormones are raging a storm, the Healer has all of us on a potion that curbs the more severe symptoms."

"Such as?" her mother asked.

"Nausea mainly," Hermione said. "I have to eat to feed the little parasite and it doesn't do much good if most of my food winds up in a toilet."

"Parasite?" her father asked.

"Well, that's what it is, isn't it? Although it has half of my genetic material, the other half is Harry's and without the hormones my immune system would treat it as a parasite since it's not me and it feeds off of me and does nothing beneficial to me in return."

Robert chuckled and shook his head. "Only my little girl would think of that! So this potion, is it safe?"

"He has a point," Rose said. "There was a drug used in Europe and Canada back in the fifties that curbed those symptoms. It also led to deformed children."

"This potion's been in use for over three hundred years, Mum," Hermione replied. "I'm certain it's safe for me and for the baby."

"So does this potion alleviate all the symptoms?" Robert asked.

"Obviously no, Daddy," Hermione said, "to do so could harm the baby."

"So you're likely to have 'The Cravings'?"

"What's that?"

"A burning desire to eat weird," Robert said. "When your Mum was pregnant with you she went on a sour fest."

"A what?" the two Granger women asked.



"Oh come on Rose," Robert said, "you wanted vinegar on everything it seemed, including your ice cream."

"Eww!" Hermione began.

"Now Robert, there's no need to exaggerate. You know full well I stopped putting vinegar on my ice cream once I found that pickle relish was so much better."

"That's so wrong!" Hermione said.

"It's not unheard of," Rose said. "Neither are the late night snacks. My Doctor told me both were related to my body's need both for food in general and certain vitamins in particular. Even with supplements, I still had my cravings. Although the good news is they only lasted a few months and my last several weeks I was only hungry a lot. Didn't need the relish ice cream anymore."

"That's good to know," Hermione said.

"Come to think of it, the Cravings went away right about the same time you discovered how to tap dance on my bladder," Rose added.

"I did not!"

"You most certainly did! You had no sense of time either. Used to wake me up at three in the morning with your exertions! Honestly, I lost less sleep after you were born! After three weeks, you were sleeping through the night. Mum told me I was lucky. All three of my brother Daniel's kids took two months or so to sleep through the night. Before then, they went off like clockwork every three hours or so."

"You make is sound ... Is that why you two never had any others?"

The two older Grangers looked at each other.

"No, Hermione," Rose said. "I didn't mind being pregnant with you at all. I certainly didn't mind you as a baby. You were usually very quiet and pleasant as one. You only got loud when you nappie needed changing and I wasn't in the room with you and even then, when I

stood up you stopped. And even though we did not know what it was at the time, your magic never scared us."

"Then why..."

"We never told you this," Robert said, "I guess mainly because you never asked. We're not ashamed or any of that."

"Daddy?" Hermione asked.

"You know I met your father at the University," Rose said. "It was actually our first day of classes. Robert was older as he had spent some years in the Royal Navy..."

"Submarines," Robert added. "I worked with the sonar. Spent most of my time at sea chasing Russian subs."

"We dated practically from the start and decided to get married fairly early on, but wanted to wait until we had our degrees. Then we decided on Dental School and wanted to wait until we finished there."

"Which we did in June of '81," Robert said.

"But that's after I was born!" Hermione said.

The two parents nodded. "I moved in with your father when we started Dental School. My parents were scandalized or would have been had they not seen it coming."

"That and your Dad likes me," Robert added.

"And we were married in a small civil ceremony in March of 1979," Rose said.

"But I've seen your wedding pictures!" Hermione protested.

"That was later, after you were born," Rose said.

"We were engaged when we learned you were coming," Robert said. "We had not set a date yet. We married three weeks after we learned you were on the way and had our wedding after you were born because there wasn't time to do it proper..."

"That and there was no way I was walking down the aisle big as a house!" Rose added. "We didn't get married because of you, Hermione. We got married because we love each other. You just sped up the timing is all. As for why you have no brother or sister, well raising a little girl while in school was hard work, as it was when we left school and were starting out as Dentists. We were not about to add another to the mix back then. It's not that we didn't want another child or that you convinced us not to have one, it was just the circumstances and when we thought we were ready..."

"Your mother has had four miscarriages since you were born," Robert said.

"I'm sorry," Hermione said.

"It's not your fault, Child," Rose said. "They all happened early. All of them were within the first three months or so. Had I made it further along, you would have known, but we felt it best not to tell you. My Doctor says they could have happened for any reason, but the stress of my job may have been a factor."

"The last one happened a few weeks after you left to come here," Robert said. "We were so hoping you'd come home for Christmas and find out you had a little brother or sister on the way, but..."

"We've been afraid to try again," Rose added.

"Would you want another child?" Hermione asked.

Her parents nodded. "If we could," Robert said. "But we're soon to be grandparents..."

"So?" Hermione said. "If it was stress, then here you are with fifteen months of no worries. When this is over, it'll be April 2nd 1995 for the rest of the world. We have Healers here who might be able to help you. So what if you're about to become Grandparents! Mum's still only thirty-eight. Then again..."

"What?" Robert asked.

"Well, my son or daughter will be a little older. And yet if you had another child, they would be his or hers Aunt or Uncle. But no matter! We'll set it up so you can visit whenever you want."

"Thanks, Hermione," Rose said.

Robert nodded. "You know we had objections to this," he said.

"I'd have been surprised if you did not," Hermione replied.

"I didn't want you to go through what we did," Robert said. "Yet here we are. Rose was twenty-three when you were born. You're only fifteen."

"Technically sixteen," Hermione replied, "and I'll technically be seventeen when this happens."

"Still," Robert began.

"In many ways you're like us," Rose said. "We could see this coming from your letters. We knew you loved Harry with all your heart and like us, you moved forward with that much sooner than those of us adults expected. Unlike us, your child is planned and not an accident of fate. We've always loved you, Hermione. We have from the moment we learned you were coming to us. But you were ... unexpected."

"We're still uncomfortable with the Plural Marriage thing," Robert continued. "But we've met the others and their families and ... they are all very nice girls."

"And good friends," Hermione added.

"Which is probably a good thing," Rose said.

"And we know Harry does care about you deeply," Robert said. "The others as well, but you especially. We also know he has the means to take care of all of you and all of your children. That was something we had to struggle with when you were born and we are happy you won't have to go through that. We can see he'll make a wonderful father - assuming he can find the time for it."

"Daddy!"

"He's gonna have nine kids, Hermione!"

"Ten most likely, maybe more."

"Oh?"

"Padma and Parvati are identical twins, as was their mother and grandmother for certain. They're pretty sure they will each have identical twin girls, although it's too early to know that for certain. Then there's the Fertility Potion we used which increases the chances of fraternal twins. One of the side effects is that at least one in ten pregnancies with that potion bear twins."

"So you could be expecting twins?"

Hermione nodded. "It is a possibility that I can't discount although in all probability that won't be the case. But Padma aside, I think it's fair to say there'll be at least one set of twins."

"Do you have what you need for them?" Rose asked.

Hermione nodded. "We learned real quick it's better to have too much in the way of supplies than too little given that we can't replenish our stores while we're under Time Compression. We have enough food to last a hundred adults and forty elves for up to five hundred days and we have baby food and other supplies for thirty babies for over a year, even though we don't expect that many at all, and certainly not for that long."

"So soon it's frozen, freeze dried and reconstituted stuff just like back aboard the boat?" Robert asked.

"That's not magical," Hermione said. "We use Stasis Charms. The food - even the milk - is under a form of magical suspended animation and has been since we got it. If it was fresh when we got it, it will remain that way when we get around to using it. If you order fresh fish for dinner on day 450, as far as the fish is concerned - and anything that might ruin it - it's only been minutes since it was picked out at the market, not more than a year. There'll be fresh fruit the entire time we're here and fresh vegetables and meat. The bread will be baked daily down in the kitchens. About the only thing we

may run out of is beer, wine and other adult beverages. Then again, we did stock a fair bit of that as well for the adults who are here."

"How does that work?" Robert asked.

"It's a form of time manipulation not unlike the Time Compression we're experiencing," Hermione explained. "Under Time Compression, the magic allows us to experience time at an accelerated rate as compared to others. There are spells used in dueling that give you a burst of speed for a few seconds real time, but they are taxing to cast. They're best used to run away. We use similar spells in the Greenhouse to accelerate plant growth. What we have in this Wing is a rune based ward that achieves the same result over a large area. Then there was spells that do the opposite: slow time down as compared to the rest of the world. There's a few dueling spells that do that if they are not blocked. The Stasis Charm stops time in its tracks as far as the target is concerned. We use it here for food storage and preservation. Healers use it to stop a person from dying so they have time to heal them. Very useful stuff!"

"Except for the aging part," Robert said.

Hermione nodded. "That is a concern. When we leave Time Compression it'll be ten in the morning, April 2nd, 1995 outside these walls. Since March 18th, I will have added about twenty-eight months to my life and, I sure, have shortened my full life expectancy by a similar amount - assuming I die of old age and not something else. Then again, assuming I die of old age, as a witch we're talking well over a hundred years from now despite this. None of us want to live our lives in the blink of an eye. Under Time Compression, we are safe from attack. There's a temporal rift at the ward line and if one tried to force their way across it - in either direction - that rift would rip them to pieces quite literally. While we are safe running time at a different speed from the outside world, we are also totally cut off from the rest of the world."

"Couldn't you run time at a slower than normal rate and achieve the same result?" Robert asked.

"Not without redoing the Ward scheme which would take months and would have to be done at normal time. It was actually pretty easy to set this up, but a not nearly as easy to reverse as it were. And there's still the problem of the rift. We would remain totally cut

off from the outside world. It's a great idea if all you want to do is hide from the world - provided you have the supplies - but not much use if you want a connection to the outside world, which most of us do. We do have family who live outside."

"Oh My God!" Rose said. "Robert? We've come to accept this, but what do we tell the family? To them, Hermione's just fifteen and soon to be a mother! There's no way they'll believe she's married and even less of a chance they'll believe she's one of nine wives!"

"So we leave out a few things," Hermione said. "I haven't seen my Aunts, Uncles and Cousins since last Summer. They've been busy or we have or I've been away. As for my Grandparents, surely we can come up with something, can't we? Then again..."

"What?" Rose asked.

"I think we should tell Grandma Cathy."

"My Mum?" Rose asked, "Why? Tell her what?"

"Everything!"

"WHAT?"

"She doesn't know I'm a witch and neither do the others. But she is a granddaughter of Rowena Ravenclaw, as are you and I. That was the line with the magical connection, even if it has been dormant for five hundred years or so. She deserves to know I am a witch and it's from her and her mothers' line that my magic came to me and that I am, as a result, part owner of all of this. All of this is her heritage and yours, Mum, just as it is mine. I merely was the first who could claim it by getting our magic back. I think she'll understand, Mum. She always said we came from Royalty, although she could not point to it. We can now, at least to the extent Rowena was Royalty. She wasn't, but she was about as close as magical Britain ever had to it along with the other three."

"We've ... well this has been an adjustment for us," Rose said. "All of this! Magic, your marriage, the fact we'll be grandparents a lot sooner than we had thought, all of this has been an adjustment."

Hermione nodded. "I guess I can see that. I got thrown in, for lack of a better description and being me took it in. But I live this life and you two ... live through my letters and what I say to you on Holidays, at least until now. I felt like I was losing you two," Hermione said with tears in her eyes.

"You can't lose us, Little One," Rose said.

"We won't let you," Robert added. "I happen to like Harry, Little One. I didn't want to ... after all you're no longer my little girl because of him."

"I'll always be that, Daddy," Hermione said with a weak smile.

Robert nodded. "But the Little Girl can't be a Mum. Ruins the image. I knew this would happen one day, just didn't think it'd be before I was fifty. But it is and I can see you've done well and I can't really blame him for this."

"No, you can't," Hermione agreed.

"We want to remain a part of your life, Hermione," Rose said. "At least for a while more."

"You will," Hermione replied. "We'll see to it that it happens. After all, we do own this place and can overrule rules that we find unnecessary, such as Muggle parents visiting us here whenever they like - and hopefully quite often."

"It's help if there was a decent golf course near by," Robert joked.

Hermione laughed. "I'll have to talk with the others about that one, but I'd agree we need more than just a silly Quidditch pitch."

As they laughed there was a knock on the door and Ginny entered. "We got twenty minutes," she said. "Not getting cold feet, are we?"

"Not at all Gin," Hermione said.

"Oh My!" Rose said. "Almost ruined the whole thing! You got something New and something Blue, yes?" She was referring to at the very least the sapphire necklace Hermione wore.



"Yes," Hermione nodded, including her dress in that equation.

"You have something old? Something borrowed?"

Hermione shook her head. "Forgot," she began.

"Which is why I'm here," Rose said proudly. She unwrapped a package. "This is the veil and headband I wore at my wedding," she said. "The elves all but emptied our house. It should work."

Hermione put it on and in her opinion, and her parents, and Ginny's, Daphne's, Padma's and Hannah's (her Bride's Maids) it did.

"So," Robert said, "if you're ready, what say I escort you to this Prince of yours?"

#### THE SOUTH WING - TIME COMPRESSION DAY 27.

"Thank goodness that's over!" Harry exclaimed as he relaxed in his huge bathtub with Gabrielle. Harry and Gabrielle's wedding was the day before and the last of the weddings. It had begun with Hermione and remembered seeing her walking down the aisle with her father in her stunning dress and seeing nothing but the smile on her face. He had similar images of most of his brides, including Gabrielle. But for eight days in a row, he had either been a groom or a best man, for he had been Neville's best man in all but one wedding. Neville was his three times and a groomsman four times having missed that job for Katie's wedding. She went with a Quidditch theme. All the members of the bridal party played so Neville and Remus were replaced by Cedric and Viktor Krum, not that Neville was complaining. Nine times the Groom, eight times best man; the only wedding where Harry was not Best Man was for Parvati, but that was a double wedding and he was Padma's groom that day. Harry was tired of weddings.

"Did you not like our wedding, Love," Gabrielle asked with a false pout. Harry knew she was teasing a little. She was probably as tired of weddings as he was. Well, maybe not. She had been a Bride but once, a Maid of Honor once for her friend Michelle and a Bridesmaid two other times. Aside from their own weddings, all of the girls had been in at least three bridal parties.

Harry smiled. "It was wonderful. But if there is another, I'd rather be just a guest."

Gabrielle nodded. "It is 'ard to remember zem all," she admitted. "I remember ze ones I was in, especially ours." Gabrielle had been Maid of Honor for Michelle and a Bridesmaid for Hannah and Daphne.

"Unfortunately, I was in every one of them either as Groom or as Neville's Best Man. I'm trying hard to remember all of my weddings, but it all seems a bit blurry in ways."

"Which ones stand out more?"

"Dangerous question," Harry chuckled. "I say that and someone will be upset."

"Hermione's?"

"Of course," Harry said. "She was the first, after all."

"Hannah's?"

"How can I not remember that one with Sirius escorting the lovely and definitely blushing bride."

"Katie's?"

"The All Star Quidditch Bridal party? Good thing we don't have a pitch or I'd bet she would have skived the dancing for a pick up match in her gown!"

"Padma's?"

"The double wedding? I swear there should be a limit on how many women the groom should be required to dance with."

"Marcia's?"

"That was a nice one. Very subdued compared to some of the others. I think she planned it that way so as to give us all a little break."

"Rosie's?"

"Should have locked the bar. I had a good time but there were a few who had a little too much to drink and a little too much fun. Fortunately, it didn't ruin Rosie's day."

"Daphne's?"

"She looked really amazing. As did you and the others, but that's what I remember most about Daphne's. Well, that an Victor asking if he and Katya could get married while they're here."

"And what did you say to zat?"

Harry shrugged. "So long as we get a few weeks or more of a break from weddings, I don't see why not."

Gabrielle nodded. "It 'as been a bit much. But all of us wanted it sooner rather than later. In a few months or less, we would not 'ave been able to fit into our dresses. Luna's?"

"There's one where a dress might not have been an issue! I don't think anyone will forget that one!" Harry laughed. "I'm just glad she chose to put on her dress for the reception!" Luna had chosen an ancient magical right. As per that right, the Bride was naked. It was supposed to symbolize fertility, love, and a new life as a wife for the bride entered her first life without clothes as well. "That and fortunately the Elves pictures of the ceremony were tasteful. Then again, I'm not sure if Luna likes wearing clothes at all."

Gabrielle nodded. "See, you remember quite well! And I was afraid all you would remember was Luna's fashion choice. Although she was under a type of charm at your wedding. While we were aware of 'er attire, I am told none but you were able to see 'er as a whole. For the rest of us, 'er details below 'er shoulders and above 'er thighs were nothing more than a sense of color. Zere were, after all, some young men present who need not see such."

Harry nodded. "She never mentioned that. Then again, she probably wouldn't as it wasn't important to her. Her dress was really nice," Harry said with a smile. "Once she put it on. I'm still surprised her father was so - he acted like it was normal."

"I am sure you have noticed that Mr. Lovegood is odd, even by our standards," Gabrielle laughed.

Harry could only nod in agreement. "At least we have the day off to recover from all of that."

"Hmmm, but as you 'ave said zere is another wedding sometime before this Time is over. In fact, I would not be surprised if zere was more zan one."

"Oh?"

"Have you not noticed ze new couples?"

"New couples? You mean Fred and Alicia and George and Angelina?"

"Non. Zey are 'old couples' as if zey were together before coming 'ere. Although zey are all of age now and it would not surprise me if zey asked to be wed as well. But zere are new couples as well. You 'ave not noticed?"

"I haven't ... who?"

"Your Godfather Sirius for one," Gabrielle giggled.

"Sirius? And what's so funny?"

"It is amusing not funny, 'Harry," Gabrielled said. "Ze others will be pleased to hear you 'ave not noticed what zey all 'ave. Through zese weddings, Sirius 'as stayed close to ze same unmarried woman ze whole time. 'E sits with 'er at meals and dances with 'er more any any of ze others. You still do not know?"

Harry shook his head.

"Marilyn Abbott."

"Hannah's Mum?"

Gabrielle nodded.

"Zey may not 'ave noticed yet," Gabrielle replied. "I am Veela, if you must know, so I can see zese things or I can now zat I am bonded to my 'usband. Your Sirius sees 'er as ... well, as what 'e wants in a woman. She sees 'im as charming and ... well, they did fancy each other once upon a time. But zey were in different 'Ouses 'ere and in zeir time it was rare to cross over, as it were. 'E never asked her out back then."

"You sure about this? Sirius and her? I thought he had a thing for Susan's Aunt."

Gabrielle shrugged. "It is not certain, 'Arry. I would say likely, but not certain. Zey 'ave to see it for themselves and see it for what it is and not for what it is not. But do not be surprised if zey do. As for Madam Bones, while 'e may 'ave 'ad a thing for 'er once upon a time, she never saw 'im as a romantic way. Ze are friends."

Harry chuckled. "And now I may have another father-in-law."

"It is not ze same, no? 'E is on your side in zis?"

Harry smiled. "Yes, he is or at least he seems to be."

"'E is, 'Arry."

"And these other couples?" Harry asked.

"First, I do not include any who are younger zen us. Zere might be some zere, but zey are too young to consider now. Zere are two other possible couples, but it is too early to say."

"Oh?"

"For now, all zey are doing zat I can see is looking at each other when ze other is not noticing and smiling silly about it."

"Any hints?"

"My sister might be one."

"Let me guess. Bill Weasley?"

"'Ow did you..."

"First off, I think we can rule out any of the First or Second Years who are here..."

"Eew!"

"Exactly. Second, we can also rule out the married men."

"My sister is not about to stoop to zat."

"She's a bit of a show off, isn't she?"

Gabrielle nodded.

"So being a mistress is out as is being a second wife. It's all or nothing for her. Now Neville and I are certainly taken, Victor is as well and is immune to her."

"And does not like her zat much."

"No, he doesn't. Cedric is not immune, which means Fleur is not attracted to him. The Twins were not immune until after the Yule Ball as far as I could tell which was when they got together with their girls. I also don't think she's into really old wizards, which rules out Professor Tofty. The only one who I've noticed is immune to her allure is Bill Weasley."

"You are correct, 'Arry. Fleur thinks zat 'e may be ... She 'ope's 'e will be 'er Bondmate."

"Hopes? But you bonded with me so quickly!"

"You saved my life, 'Arry. It makes it all but impossible to resist the Bonding Urge. Zat, and I was and am young. I had not matured yet so ze Urge to Bond with you could not be denied. Fleur is older. She can resist the Urge for she knows what it is and 'ow to deal with it. I 'ad never dealt with it before and the Life Debt overwhelmed me."

"I'm sorry," Harry said.

"D-do you regret...?"

"No! No! Not at all, Gabrielle. I don't regret you chose me. I did choose you, after all - along with the others. You're my wife and I love you and do not regret it for a minute. I am only sorry you could not ... um ...."

"Resist the Urge and pursue you naturally?"

Harry nodded.

Gabrielle shrugged. "It is not important. I am happy with ze way it 'as turned out."

"So am I but..."

"No but, 'Arry. There should never be any of zat with us, no?"

Harry sighed.

"Besides, I am not sad zat I am to be yours for the rest of my life. I am not sad our daughters will 'ave you as a father."

"You're having twins?" Harry asked in shock.

"It is too early to say and Veela rarely have such. But as Veela, I can only bear daughters and I do want more zen one in ze end."

"How many more than one?"

Gabrielle shrugged. "It is too early to say, no? Do you ask zat of all your wives?"

"Er..."

"I thought not. Rest assured, you will have a lot of children, 'Arry."

"I really need a Holiday!"

"Is zis not one?"

"You mean today or all that was before?"

"Yes."

"Before was for many, but not me. All those weddings - not that I'm complaining about ours, but..."

"It was tiring."

Harry nodded.

"And we only have today off. Tomorrow we begin classes and such."

"I wish it was more."

"So do I, but Hermione insists. I think she feels we all have had enough of a holiday," Harry said.

## THE SOUTH WING - TIME COMPRESSION DAY 65.

They had just completed their sixth week of classes in the South Wing. They went to class five days in a row with a one day weekend before they began again. As Hermione had planned there were four classes. The "Upper Years" were the eight students working towards their NEWTs. NEWT level courses were offered in what this school said were "core" courses: Ancient Runes, Arithmancy, Charms, Defense Against the Dark Arts, Herbology, Potions and Transfiguration. These students also studied Occlumency. Runes, Arithmancy and Herbology were optional for the NEWT students, but they all were taking them anyway as the class was so small the professors could teach them almost independently. The "Upper Years" also had and electives in History (taught by Pierre Delacour, Amelia Bones and Benjamin Caldwell - the latter taught History at a University and this course covered "true magical history" and history of western civilization), French (taught by Madame Maxine and Appoline Delacour) and Italian (taught by Sabrina Marcella). Dueling and Healing, along with Physical Training were also taught and were mandatory.

The "Lower Years" took Charms, Defense Against the Dark Arts (with and introduction to Dueling), one hour a week in Basic Healing and Herbology, Potions and Transfiguration. They had the language electives as well. Physical training was also mandatory.

Harry was in the "Middle Year," which was divided into two sections. He and his wives were in one and Neville, his wives and Cho Chang were in the other. They all had Ancient Runes headed by Professor



Babbling with Bill Weasley as an assistant who added aspects of Curse Breaking and Warding to the instruction. He also assisted Professor Vector in Arithmancy as well. Professor Flitwick and Madam Maxine taught Charms. Professor Sprout taught Herbology, although the first couple of weeks she was more excited about the Greenhouse and what they all had accomplished already than teaching. They had Healing with Healers Ted Tonks and Al Turpin, History with that crew, Potions with Andromeda Tonks, and Transfiguration with Professor McGonagall. Professor Lupin was in charge of their Defense Against the Dark Arts program, but he was assisted by Miss "Don't Call Me Nymphadora" Tonks for dueling, Sirius Black for aspects of Dark Magics and Amelia Bones for legal stuff. Professor Flitwick was also in charge of Dueling, but he had several assistant instructors. Harry and most of his wives were taking French as well. (Hermione was taking both French and Italian as were Marcia and Daphne. Gabrielle was taking Italian only.)

Harry was thoroughly enjoying his classes. Then again, because there were so many courses and only a one day weekend every other week or so, aside from reading and revising, there was little homework. The strange schedule was to maximize instruction. Originally, they were to have five days of classes with one day off all the time, but Hermione soon figured out that first of all they needed a little more time off and secondly her original schedule meant that Katie, Marica and Gabrielle would be the only three of them who would be Harry's witch on his days off. Consequently, every other week or so they enjoyed a two day weekend.

They had two short essays each week, that was all and all the Professors cooperated in seeing it that way. In exchange, however, everyone was expected to participate in classes. Given the very small class size and the fact that at least in Harry's section no one ridiculed or snickered at a student who was momentarily stuck on a problem, it was actually the best learning experience he had to date. They were expected to help each other, something even Hermione could not complain about as she had been doing that for Harry and Ron since First Year. And considering with Gabrielle he and his girls had their own private tutor, he even enjoyed French Class which, as he thought, might well be almost as hard as Arithmancy, but he enjoyed that class as well as Professor Vector, while demanding, was very entertaining.

By far now his favorite class was dueling. It was held during some of the magical training sessions, so it was not part of the classroom instruction at all. This was all about fighting, something he now took quite seriously given that it was clear Voldemort was still out there in some form and his Slytherin mates were certain some of their former Housemates were already actively recruiting for the Dark Lord's return. Although, they did admit it might just be for more Pureblood nonsense, absent Dark Lord notwithstanding.

More than that, however, there was Caldwell's book on Dueling. Already Harry, Neville and their girls were making huge progress on silent spell casting based upon that book. They were also learning to reduce their wand movements, hopefully to nothing. Once they mastered those skills, they could move on to his real premise: spell masking. They had shown the book to Professor Flitwick and he agreed it was an amazing work, although he conceded the spell masking would be beyond him and many others as it was clear one had to master Occlumency and with his heritage that was not possible. He had a natural form of it, but as a result could not learn the learned art of it which seemed to be required. Despite his own limitations in this regard, he encouraged them to try and learn the skills the author had never taught.

Life in the Wing was starting to have a routine, and it was not just the classes. Classes were the dominant feature for the students like Harry, but they were well attended by the adults as well. The Muggle parents in particular were almost always observing one class or another. Hermione's parents, for example, had attended every one of their Ancient Runes, Arithmancy and Healing lessons and Harry was not surprised to learn they had their own copies of the course books. Apparently, the Grangers were also observing the Lower Year classes in other subjects. They were hardly the only ones, but he saw far more of them and the other Muggle Parents than the others.

Once the wedding cycle had ended, Harry's House had returned to their "Witch of the Day" scheme. After breakfast, Harry's witch would be with him for most of the day, sitting beside him in class and at lunch and studying with him. He and his girls ate breakfast and lunch in the Main Dining Room with all the others. Dinner, however, was a semi-private affair in his Private Apartment. Each night, his "Witch of the Day" and her family would join him for their private

dinner. They were often joined by Sirius and Remus, but not always, and maybe other guests who his witch invited.

There was an exception to this practice. The Wing had taken to celebrating "assimilated birthdays," that being the Time Compression day corresponding to someone's birthday. There had been five so far including Laura Caldwell's simulated seventeenth on Day 32 and Rosie's simulated fifteenth Day 51. The birthday dates took into account the prior Time Compression as well. Legally, the two were still fifteen and thirteen. On those days, the entire Wing ate dinner together in the Main Dining Room and there was cake, followed by general socializing with the recreation room filled with ongoing games and dancing in the Ballroom. There were no real presents, after all it was not like there was any place to shop for them. But it was generally a good time. They already were thinking of including an "assimilated" Halloween on Day 211 and Christmas on day 266.

Today's assimilated date was June 4th, Day 65. It was also a day off from classes. Hannah was Harry's "Witch of the Day," but the day off mean that while he would spend hours with Hannah, he and she were also allowed hours for "girl" or "bloke" time. For Harry, this meant the recreation room as that was where all the males hung out. There were games to be played or watched as the Entertainment Mirror showed old Quidditch matches, Football, Rugby and a few other sports as well. For Hannah, it was a time to hang out with the women of the Wing either on the balcony or in the salons. This was her chance to hang out with Susan and some of the other girls who were not part of her House, just as it was Harry's chance to hang out with blokes, rather than a bunch of girls. The truth was neither Harry, nor Hannah, nor any of Harry's other girls minded their arrangement at all, but it was nice to be with others as well. As with every day off so far, Harry would spend the late afternoon and evening with his witch.

Harry walked into his family Dining Room and saw that Hannah, her mother and Sirius were already there.

"Sorry," he said as he walked over and kissed Hannah on the cheek, "got tied up."

Hannah chuckled. "Maybe we shouldn't have had dart boards in the Rec Room." Harry had taken a fancy to the Muggle game as had a surprising number of others. "Did you win?"

"Not the last one," Harry shrugged. "It was close, but Bill edged me in the end."

"Eddie? You can begin serving now," Hannah said. Eddie was one of Hannah's elves.

"We have something to tell you two," Marilyn Abbott began.

"Oh?" Harry and Hannah asked together and blushing. Whether the two admitted it or not, it was now obvious to everyone in the Wing they were an item.

"We're kind of together," Sirius began as he and Marilyn blushed.

"You think?" Hannah laughed. "Kind of? What does that mean? After all, the Weasley Twins have a pool as to the date you two started shagging!"

"We have not!" Hannah's mother began.

"Mum," Hannah said, "am I in a position to judge? I'm legally fifteen and technically sixteen and I am pregnant and married. I chose to be so, to be with my Harry here. I can only ask you, does Sirius make you happy? For that is all that matters."

"He does," Marilyn said softly. "He really does. I hope that doesn't bother you."

"Mum, you two have been an item for weeks. If it bothered me, you would have heard by now."

"She's not shy about that," Harry added. "We've already talked about your - er - relationship. She thinks Sirius is a good match..."

"Provided he really means it," Hannah added.

"I do," Sirius said. "Already asked her, but she said she wants your approval first - both you and Harry, Hannah."

"Approval for what?" Harry asked, although he suspected where this was going.

"We want to marry," Marilyn said.

The two teens looked at each other and smiled.

"You expect me to call you Dad, forget about it," Hannah said.

"But it's okay by us," Harry said.

"But you're a fugitive," Hannah began.

"Amelia hopes to change all that - eventually," Sirius said.

"Until then?"

"We were hoping we could have a place here," Marilyn said.

Harry nodded. "Already thought of having Sirius stay here. We have two extra suites in the Private Apartments. I was planning to turn one into a stable for Buckbeak, but there's still the spare."

"I'd love to have you here, Mum."

"So this is no problem for you two?" Sirius asked.

"You make my Mum happy," Hannah replied. "I see that. And you are a decent man, public opinion aside. I'd be happy to see you together."

"Harry?"

"Don't expect me to call you 'Dad.' That's just too weird. So when do you two want to do this?"

"As soon as we can."

"Bit quick, don't you think?"

"Says the boy who married nine women at fourteen, eight of whom by surprise," Hannah chuckled.

Harry shrugged. "Fine! Guilty!"

"Day 84 is already booked," Hannah said. "Victor and Katya want to be married here where they can avoid both the spectacle and the pressure from their country and such. The next available date is Day 97."

"Has to be a two day weekend," Harry said. "Gives us a day to recover. You're not going to ask me to be Best Man or something?"

Sirius shook his head. "Groomsman for certain. Moony will be best man, if he agrees."

Harry nodded. "I can't believe you're asking for my blessing," he began.

"Um ..." Sirius started as he and Marilyn blushed.

## THE SOUTH WING - TIME COMPRESSION DAY 65.

Hermione had her own traditions now. At least two night a week, she dined privately with her parents in her Private Apartment. She had, after all, promised them this was time to be a regular family again and her parents appreciated their time together as just the Grangers. The day off was almost always one of those days, the exception being when it was Hermione's turn to be Harry's Witch of the Day, but as that involved a private meal with her parents as well, it counted. Harry was getting along very well with her parents and, for the most part, all the others as well. Mr. Patil, while grudgingly accepting of all of this, was still a bit of a pill, then again maybe that was just who he was.

"So Hermione," Rose said as the salads appeared, "did you have your appointment with your Healer?"

"I did indeed, Mum. Third one."

"How are you doing?"

"Quite well," Hermione said. "Healer Tonks said my weight is spot on and I'm doing quite well. Still..."

"Still?"

"I'm randy as hell, Mum..."

"Do I really need to know this?" Robert Granger asked.

"Now Bob," Rose sighed, "you know damn well what her hormones are doing to her. Or did you forget just how randy I was until about the seventh month."

"Actually, it became sane after about five," Robert said. "Still, I really don't want to know this about my little girl!"

"Five? Seven? Oh bother!" Hermione said.

Robert grinned evilly. "Just before the eight months it became too uncomfortable for her, even on top! Cut me off she did!"

"Now that's not true, Bob," Rose said. "I just cut you off from ... from where it was uncomfortable. You must admit you did enjoy my replacement."

"Replacement?" Hermione asked.

"Do we need to discuss this?" Robert said.

"We do," Rose said. "Our girl is married, pregnant and randy. She should know how we dealt with that hormonal problem."

"That's what Healer Tonks said it was," Hermione said. "The potions I've been taking take some of the edge off. I'm not as emotionally challenged and am not losing my cookies all the time. But being randy - well the potion doesn't alter that. And I'm not the only one. We all hoped when the fertility potion wore out we'd be less so, but we're maybe more so. I had to work out another schedule for us so we get more 'Harry Time' than just once every nine days. Not that I mind at all, but it's bloody annoying and ... and I feel a little sorry for Harry."

"Sorry for Harry?" Robert asked then realized it was a dumb question.

"We NEED him, Daddy. Even with my schedule, we can only be with him one night in nine and for a ... a quickie ... one day in three. We need him but don't want to wear him out. He's ... well he is amazing in all things that way and..."

"Okay, I really don't want to hear anymore!" Robert said. "But are you happy with all this?"

Hermione smiled. "Oddly enough, I am! I admit, it's only been a few months, but I am! I would love to have Harry all to myself. I can't lie about that. I think we'd all love to be his only. But it seems that was not meant to be, so we each must accept this. He is a wonderful husband. He really is! When I am with him ... he makes me feel so special! And I know he does the same for my 'Sister Wives', which is what we call each other. It might not be what I dreamt about before as perfection, but when I am with him he does make me feel so special and I know he does that for the others as well. It's not fairytale perfect, but it's close, Dad."



"Robert, stop pestering the girl," Rose said.

"What?"

"You've been pestering Hermione like an annoying little brother for almost two months! The deal is done. She's married whether we wanted it this way or not and she's still our daughter which means it's now our job to support her decision, not pester her about it!"

"So, Hermione," Rose said turning to her daughter, "do you know what it is yet? A boy or a girl?"

"Not yet, and I'm not sure I want to find out before hand."

"But I thought with magic..."

"We can tell, but not until the third month or so," Hermione said. "I don't yet understand the full theory behind the detection spell the Healer uses. I know it's a variation on the more general class of magic detection spells. At this stage, my Healer can tell me if the child is magical and if there's more than one - although I think you could do that just as well with a sonogram or stethoscope. To detect the gender, the baby's life force magic must be a little more developed. But I can tell you know that they're both very magical babies."

"Both?" the Grangers asked.

Hermione nodded. "It's twins!"

"That's wonderful, Hermione," Rose said.

"How?" Bob asked.

"Bob, don't tell me you don't know where babies come from," Rose teased.

"It's not that," Bob said, "I mean there's no history of twins..."

"Anyone can have twins," Rose said. "A history of twins within the maternal line merely means it's more likely than for a woman without such a family history."

Hermione nodded. "Healer Tonks did confirm what we already knew - that the fertility potion we took increases the likelihood of fraternal twins. He explained it to me this morning. Something like seventy percent of all pregnancies start out as possible fraternal twins. Two eggs are released during ovulation and at least one if not both are fertilized. But humans are not adapted to support multiples by nature. A child is a very demanding thing, he says, so women are adapted to reduce the possibility of twins. When the first fertilized egg imbeds itself in the uterine wall, it sets off a hormonal reaction that is supposed to prevent any other eggs from imbedding as well. There's only a limited period of time for two eggs to imbed and once that time is up, the remaining egg - if there is one - cannot. It dies. The fertility potion interferes with that reaction to increase the possibility of a viable pregnancy, hence there is an increased possibility of twins."

"Are there any others?" Rose asked.

Hermione nodded. "Parvati and Padma also learned their having twins. Although they are not surprised as there is a history in their maternal line. Theirs are probably paternal twins and, if their history continues, most likely girls. Aside from that, only Angela's expecting two for the price of one. Still, two out of sixteen with no past history of twins are expecting such which is way outside the norm."

"Have you thought of names yet?" Rose asked.

"Harry and I already picked a couple, but that was before we learned of this. We're keeping those two names as our primary ones and will think about a second set of names in case we have either two girls or two boys."

"And what names have you selected?"

"The first born boy will be Robert James after his grandfathers and first girl will be Lily Rose after her grandmothers," Hermione said with a smile.

"Nice names," Robert said proudly.

"Of course, this probably will affect my due date," Hermione said. "Twins tend to be born early, he told us. But so long as it's after Day

230, he doesn't think it will be a problem. I just hope it's after Day 237."

"Why?" the Grangers asked.

"Because if they're born on or before Day 236, their assimilated first birthday will be August of this year. If it's in September, then their age in days and calendar ages for school will be the same. Not that it matters all that much. Who knows? By 2005 I might want them off at school! Legally, though, it won't be until fall of 2006 before we can send them here."

"You are planning to send them to school before hand," Rose began.

"Of course, mother! Although we'll need to work out the details for that, but that's five years away or so."

Rose nodded. "If for no other reason, they would benefit from the socialization."

"I didn't," Hermione said. "You know that before Hogwarts I only had one friend! But, that's neither here nor there. They'll have nine half brothers and sisters their own age, not to mention House Longbottom which will be here at least half the year as well."

"And an Aunt or Uncle their age as well," Rose said with a smile.

"Yes, that ... um ... what? What do you mean, Mum?"

"I went and saw Healer Turpin this afternoon," Rose said. "You know I haven't been feeling well..."

"You're - you're pregnant too?"

Rose nodded and Robert beamed.

"But you're..." Hermione began.

"Old?" Rose asked with a sly smile.

Hermione nodded.

"I'm not yet forty and have yet to go through menopause."

"Under eighteen, or whatever the legal age of consent is," Robert chuckled, "you're supposed to be protected by law. Past menopause, you're protected by nature. In between, you can get this way, Princess. I thought your Mum had that talk with you," he added with a laugh.

"I'm about a month along," Rose said. "Once we realized this was not a joke, we decided that since we have fifteen months here and ready access to a health care professional..."

"And potions," Robert said. "She took the fertility potion at first..."

"And it does make you randy," Rose giggled. "Now I'm on a potion to curb the hormonal effects and another because of my history of miscarriages. They'll be seeing me every week to make sure, but I am expecting. My due date is Day 310."

"That's wonderful, Mum! Oh, I can't wait to tell the others I'm gonna be a big sister!"

"And I'm gonna be a granddad with my youngest child a month or two younger than my grandchildren," Robert said. "Kind of ruins it, you know?"

"Oh?" the Grangers asked.

"The role of grandparents is to spoil their grandchildren rotten," Bob said, "after all, it's not like we have to come down on them, that's what their parents are for. But we can't do that and not do the same for our little one. It just wouldn't be right. Still..."

"If he or she is anything like Hermione, we can afford to spoil them a little. Hermione always had a good head on her shoulders."

THE SOUTH WING - TIME COMPRESSION DAY 237.

The news that the Grangers were expecting was the headline item on the WING DAILY NEWS, which broadcast each day on the entertainment mirrors and was hosted by the Weasley Twins and their girlfriends. The reports began soon after the 'Wedding Cycle' and they were more for entertainment value than anything else. The "Sports" report included all the dart scores from the previous day,

and billiards and anything else that seemed sporty - like who now held the Wing Swimming Pool record for the 100m fly or the recent three-on-three basketball tournament or the tennis matches the Muggles were playing in the Gym. It also included updated odds on the various Weasley Pools - all associated with who would go into labor when and what their kids would be, boy, girl or whatever. The Grangers now found themselves as a subject of the various betting pools. Apparently, this was a serious thing in the magical world, or at least very common. Over the next few weeks, the Grangers were joined by others and whenever another couple announced a pregnancy, it was headline news under the caption "SOUTH WING BABY BOOM!" It was certainly more entertaining than the weather, hosted by Alicia, where she told everyone that a cloud had moved a bit and how it affected sun tanning options on the balconies. On Day 75, Sira Patil and Vivian Greengrass announced their pregnancies.

On Day 84, the news was all about the wedding of Victor Krum and Katya, who had become very popular in the Wing. Katya was both smart, witty and drop dead good looking and Victor was not nearly as curt as he had been before. Katya had turned seventeen in March. Victor had turned 18 the day after the First Task, a fact the other Champions had not known at the time and felt bad about not celebrating his birthday. They made up for it at the reception. Harry was his Best Man and Cedric his other Groomsman. Fleur was Maid of Honor and Hermione a Bridesmaid. Everyone had a wonderful time. Over the next three weeks, Agnes Rosier, Elizabeth Bell and Jasmine Davis all announced they were expecting as well.

On Day 97, Sirius Black married Marilyn Abbott. They almost had to be pressured into it. Sirius was concerned about his still being a fugitive, although he no longer looked like one, nor did he look like someone who had spent twelve years locked up with dementors. Sirius was concerned that the Ministry would use his wife, who was an employee of DMLE to draw him out. Marilyn's boss, Amelia Bones, assured him that would not be the case. The Aurors assigned to his case were clearly leading everyone astray and she would allow that to continue and she would not allow the Minister or his cronies access to Marilyn under any circumstances. Amelia performed the wedding herself, with Remus as Best Man, Hannah as "Maid" of Honor and "Don't Call Me Nymphadora" Tonks and Harry as the rest of the party. (Tonks had not figured Sirius or the Twins into her name aversion. She now had to deal with that name until she picked a name she could tolerate other than "Tonks".)

Arthur Weasley escorted the Bride down the aisle and as a wedding present, Harry promised to finish the work on the final "Apartment" on his floor. It would be like the girl's apartments, but with a private kitchen and dining room and a "barn" for Sirius's friend and Hippogriff Buckbeak, who was also technically a fugitive.

Day 136 saw the marriage of Fleur Delacour to her Bondmate Bill Weasley. Bill had spent several hours over several days with Harry asking him about Veela. Harry was quite happy with Gabrielle as one of his "girls" and was more than willing to tell Bill all he knew. It was clear Bill loved the older girl, but he had been raised in Britain where Veela were considered "creatures" and not human. Harry assured him she was quite human. Veela was nothing more than a magical affinity passed from mother to daughter. While Bill was the heir of House Weasley, such as there was a house, the fact Fleur would probably only bear daughters did not concern him. After all, he had five other brothers. His mother's reaction, however, did at first. But she was not here and the more he spent time with Fleur, the more he knew this was the right thing to do. He had fallen in love with her just as she had with him and there was nothing for it but to finalize the union. Fred was his Best Man, with George as the other groomsman. Gabrielle was "Maid" of Honor with Michelle (Marcella) Longbottom as the other Bridesmaid. Madam Maxine had performed the wedding just as she had for her other two students.

By day 175, the Baby Boom Pool now included Cynthia Turpin, Pamela Lee, Allison Caldwell, Martha Urquhart and Marilyn (Abbot) Black, all would have their children while under Time Compression. Day 175 saw a double wedding. Fred married Alicia and George married Angelina. Arthur escorted them down the aisle as Bill Weasley and Harry stood up for the twins, along with Cedric Diggory and Neville Longbottom. Katie was Alicia's "Maid" of Honor and Hermione was Angelina's with Ginny and Marcia as the other Bridesmaids. All four were seventeen. As had been the case with Bill, the Twins regretted Charlie was not there. They were less concerned about Ron and Percy than Bill had been, but it was a good time. It was particularly memorable when Cedric proposed to Cho. They would not marry during this Time Compression. Cho was only sixteen and would not turn seventeen until the fall and Professors McGonagall, Flitwick and Sprout made it clear that Cho would not be allowed to get pregnant to get around the age law. Twenty such young adults were enough. But the two set a tentative

date during the Christmas Hols and asked to be married here in the Wing, a request Harry and the others were not about to deny.

Things settled down to their routine after the "Big Weasley Wedding," as the Wing Album Ginny and some others prepared were calling it. (Everyone would get a copy.) The Girls were all definitely showing by Bill and Fleur's Wedding (as was Rose Granger and a couple of the others), and they were really getting big now.

"OW!" Hermione exclaimed just before dinner. Today had been a class day.

"What?" Harry asked. Luna was his witch today, but he had been keeping a close eye on all his Girls for the last few weeks.

"Backache," Hermione said. "It's nothing to worry about."

"Sounded more than that," Harry said. "You sure?"

"I SURE! DAMN!" she cried.

"Hermione, go and call the Healer," Harry said calmly as he could.

"I'm sure it's nothing," she began.

"You're passed Day 230, Hermione. You're having twins. You know Healer Tonks told you to come to him if you had any back or stomach pains at all!"

"I'm carrying a load here, Harry! I'm sure it's just a backache!"

"Please?" Harry pleaded, "just to be sure?"

Hermione looked around throughout the Main Dining Room. Everyone was looking at her and especially her mother, father and the other Girls. "Fine," she moped, "but I'm sure it's nothing!"

A couple of hours later and Harry was back in his Private Apartment with Katie, his Witch of the Day. Her baby was active so Harry had his hand on her belly feeling it kick around.

"I swear this one's a Quidditch Player for sure," Katie said.

"You've been saying that for months, it seems," Harry said.

"He or she flies around inside like no one's business," Katie huffed.

Harry chuckled. "Most of the others are giving their Mum's fits as well."

"You're lucky!"

"You've said that."

"You don't have the little tyke dancing on your bladder!"

"Said that too, as have a few of the others. It would seem Hermione's mostly spared her that hell."

Katie looked at Harry. "You're worried, aren't you?"

"Are you?"

Katie nodded. "Deep down I am. This little Lion is giving me fits, however. I swear, the last month of this is supposed to make me want him or her to LEAVE!"

Harry chuckled, "so he or she is grounded?"

Katie laughed. "Good idea, but it won't make sense for the kid for a few more years at least. I'm worried about Hermione."

"As am I," Harry said.

The "Phone" rang. It was actually Harry's mirror. Harry activated it.

"Ah, Harry," Ted Tonks said. "Glad I could catch you. Hermione is in labor..."

"What do I need to do?" Harry started.

"She's fine," Ted said. "She's not near ready yet to deliver, but everything is fine. Sometime tomorrow, I suspect, but we have it in hand."



"Are her parents there?"

"They will be assisting."

"I'm coming down!"

"It's not necessary..."

"I'm coming down anyway!" He finished the call. "Get the others, Katie."

She nodded and left as Harry headed down to the Infirmary.

Hermione lay in her bed. The contractions were still fairly mild and wide apart. Healer Tonks said it might be morning before the babies came. Her parents were with her, her mother now seven and more months along and her father had already promised to be there with her when she delivered. The Grangers had always been a close family, but the dual pregnancies made them even closer. Her parents had finally accepted Harry and all of this, which made their being here so much better.

Harry saw her in the Infirmary a few minutes later. She was lying on one of the regular beds and looked like she was asleep with her parents seated on the empty bed next to her. For now, she was the only patient in the ward. As Harry walked over, Hermione looked to be asleep.

"How is she?" he asked quietly so as not to wake her.

"Resting," Hermione said. Harry saw she was awake.

"I thought you were..."

"Just resting," Hermione said. "Thanks for being here."

"And where else would I be?"

"Studying, I should think. OWLs are less than seventy days away, you know."

"No, Love. This is more important," Harry said as his other eight very pregnant wives joined the vigil.

"The Healer says it probably won't be for a while yet," Hermione said. "My water hasn't even broken. It could be hours yet before that happens."

"We'll be with you anyway," Katie began.

"You ladies should get your sleep," Hermione said. "Oh? Okay," she growled, "this one's not at all comfortable!"

"Parvati?" Padma called out seeing her sister enter the Wing.

"Need to see the Healer," she panted. She was being helped by Neville.

Parvati soon found herself in a bed near Hermione as it was confirmed that she too was in the beginning stages of labor.

Most of the rest of the Wing was unaware that two of their number were now in labor. That changed a couple of hours later when THE NEWS interrupted the programming on all of the entertainment channels.

"We interrupt this program for the following breaking news," Alicia announced.

"We have just received word that the Baby Boom is officially starting to begin!" Fred said.

"That's correct," George added. "Two of our lovelies are said to be in labor, although actual delivery is still hours away."

"So get out your score cards!" Fred said and a graphic showed up behind him. One section was blank. The other had Longbottom listed above Potter with two columns one labeled "Boys" and the other "Girls." "So who will be first?"

"A Potter or a Longbottom?" George said.

"Right now, the money is on either Parvati or Padma..."

"As they are having twins."

"Two girls each."

"But, maybe there's another in the mix?" George added.

"Is it the Patil twins, or is it two others?"

"Which House will have the first born?"

"And which will have the first heir?"

"And who of our lucky contestants will get their name at the top of the board?"

"Let's review our list of contestants before revealing our lucky winners tonight, shall we?" George said.

"Good plan," Fred agreed, "given as we are told it may be hours before we know who wins. Youngest to oldest?"

"Works for me. Our first possible contestant is our lovely little sister..."

"The feisty former Miss Ginny Weasley..."

"Now - it is Mrs. or Lady Longbottom?"

"Does it really matter for this?" Fred asked.

"Quite true. Not wholly relevant. Our lovely Ginny was born August 11, 1981..."

"Which makes her legally thirteen."

"Except she turned fourteen March 22nd, Time Compression Day 18 and fifteen Day 125 of this Time Compression. She'll turn sixteen on May 13th - unofficially of course but we'll celebrate it anyway."

"Our youngest Slytherin is next, the former Miss Rosie Rosier, now Rosie Potter," Fred said.

"Born May 29th, 1981, legally she's thirteen as well, but turned fourteen on March 20th, Time Compression Day 6 and fifteen on Day 51 of this Time Compression. She will celebrate her sixteenth

birthday on Day 419, just before Final Exams. She'll turn seventeen on February 23rd, 1996."

"Next up, the lovely Gabrielle Potter..." Fred said.

"Our new sister-in-law, younger sister of Fleur Delacour Weasley, wife of our brother Bill," George added.

"For those who don't know, they are holding off having children until after the Tournament."

"After June 24th, all bets are off. Now, onto Gabrielle..."

"She was born March 4th, 1981 in France meaning she's legally fourteen and month..."

"But turned fifteen April 29th, Time Compression Day 7 and will turn sixteen on Day 331. She'll turn seventeen on November 30th."

"Next is the former Andrea Lee, now Andrea Longbottom," Fred said.

"While it could be any of the lovelies, given this date the better bet is on the ladies believed or known to be having Twins and Andrea is one of those..."

"Born December 9th, 1980, Andrea is legally fourteen, but turned fifteen March 26th, Day 14 and will celebrate her Sweet Sixteen in eight days on Day 245. She'll turn seventeen on September 10th."

"Next is our sister's oldest friend, the former Miss Luna Lovegood, now Luna Potter," George said.

"Born September 21st, 1980, Luna is legally fourteen. She turned fifteen on March 23rd, Day 28 and sixteen on Day 166. She'll turn seventeen on June 23rd."

"And that completes our Third Years."

"Fourth Year begins with the former Miss Lisa Turpin, now Lisa Longbottom. Better ring to it, don't you think, George?"

"Indeed, Fred. Lisa was born August 7th, 1980 and is legally fourteen. She turned fifteen on March 22nd, Day 14 and celebrated her sweet sixteen on Day 121. She turns seventeen on May 9th."

"Which means while she began life younger than Harry and Neville, she's now a little older as they did not celebrate their sixteenth birthdays until Days 206 and 205 respectively. They'll be seventeen on July 24th and 25th which is so close to their real birthdays as not to matter."

"Next up is the former Miss Tracey Davis, now Tracey Longbottom," George said.

"Born June 30th, 1980, she's legally fourteen. She celebrated her fifteenth birthday on March 21st, Day 7 and her Sweet Sixteen on Day 83. She'll leave here legal, except in the eyes of the law as she will celebrate her seventeenth birthday on Day 449, the day before our final Day here in the Wing. She'll be eighteen on March 25th, 1996."

"At least her last birthday here will be after exams," George said. "I'd hate to have a birthday during Exams. It would take all the fun out of it."

"Too true," Fred agreed. "Now we have our lovely Italian lass, the former Miss Michelle Marcella now Michelle Lonbottom. She was born February 21st, 1980 and is legally fifteen. She celebrated her sixteenth birthday on March 28th, Day 26 and will celebrate her seventeenth on Day 319 after Exams and eighteen on November 18th."

"Next the lovely Lady Hufflepuff or Bones or whatever," George said. "We're still trying to sort Susan out that way. Suffices to say she's married to Neville."

"She was born January 21st 1980 and is legally fifteen. She turned sixteen on March 27th, Day 26 and will turn seventeen on Day 288. She'll be eighteen on October 23rd. Now we come to the lovely former Miss Daphne Greengrass, now Daphne Potter."

"She was born January 14th, 1980 and is legally fifteen. She turned sixteen on March 27th, Day 19 and will turn seventeen on Day 281."

Her eighteenth birthday will be on October 16th. Now on to the Lovely Lady Hannah Abbott, wife of Harry Potter."

"Hannah was born November 3rd 1979 and is legally fifteen," Fred said. "She turned sixteen on March 25th, Day 9 and turned seventeen on Day 209. She'll be eighteen on August 5th. Now the next two are the twins having twins - the Patil sisters Padma Potter and Parvati Longbottom."

"They were born October 17th, 1979 and are legally fifteen. They turned sixteen on March 24th, Day 23 and seventeen on Day 192. They'll be eighteen on July 19th. I think it's fair to say that it's even money that at least one of them may be down in the Infirmary as well speak."

"A fair bet. They are also the only ones we know in advance are not in the running to produce the Heir as they are both expecting twin daughters, just as they were and their mother was..."

"And their grandmother, I think," George said. "That's a lot of twin action! Now for the last of our Fourth Years, the Lady Ravenclaw or Lady Potter, take your pick."

"Our Hermione was born September 19th, 1979 and is legally fifteen. She turned sixteen on March 23rd, Day 26 and seventeen on Day 164. She'll be eighteen on June 21st. Next up we have the first of our Fifth Years, our absolutely brilliant Chaser and teammate the former Miss Katie Bell now Katie Potter."

"She was born July 12th, 1979 and is legally fifteen. She turned sixteen on March 21st, Day 19 and seventeen on Day 95. She'll be eighteen on April 13th. Next we have our Ravenclaw Prefect..."

"Who has yet to give us a detention," Fred said.

"The former Miss Laura Caldwell and now Laura Longbottom. She was born May 10th, 1979 and is legally fifteen. She turned sixteen on March 19th, Day 18 and seventeen on Day 32. She will turn 18 on Day 398 and nineteen on February 4th, 1996. Next up is a Prefect who has given us detention."

"Of course she has!" Fred said. "She's a Slytherin Prefect! It's like an unwritten law! You're not a true Slytherin Prefect until you've given us a detention!"

"We did deserve that one, though."

"Too true. Miss Lucinda Urquhart, now Lucinda Longbottom..."

"Which rolls off the tongue much easier..."

"Anyway, she was born March 30th, 1979. While legally she turned sixteen this past March 30th, she actually turned sixteen on March 19th, Day 9. She turned seventeen on Day 33 and will turn eighteen on Day 357 and nineteen on December 25th. And last, but not least..."

"Our Hufflepuff Prefect," George said.

"Who also has not given us a detention."

"Lovely Marcia Robbins, now Marcia Potter was born February 21st, 1979 which means she shares her birthday with Michelle. She's legally sixteen. She turned seventeen on March 28th, Day 26 and will turn eighteen on Day 319 and nineteen on November 18th."

"So, Alicia, who are our lucky winners tonight?" George asked.

"Hermione and Parvati," Alicia said.

"Hermione? Really?" Fred said as he tore up what looked like a ticket. "Is that odd?"

"Not really," Alicia replied. "It turns out Hermione is expecting twins as well, as is her Mum, by the way."

"Well that changed things!" George complained. "She never told us that!"

"And whoever she did tell didn't tell us," Fred added. "Although it could mean that House Potter will have an heir soon."

"So, there you have it! Hermione Potter and Parvati Longbottom are in labor, each with twins."

"We are told it probably won't be until morning before anything truly happens."

"Oh, and this note from Professor McGonagall: Classes are cancelled! We're officially on holiday! Classes will resume at a later time, possibly as early as Day 260. She also implores us to keep studying, although not too hard."

"We now return you to the regularly scheduled program..."

THE SOUTH WING - TIME COMPRESSION DAY 238.

"We interrupt this morning's regularly scheduled program for the following breaking news," Alicia announced.

"So the question on everyone's mind is who's first, Hermione or Parvati?" George asked.

"And is anyone else in labor?" Fred added.

"Well," Angelina said, "as to anyone else not yet. As to your other question: at 0938 Wing Time, Day 238, Hermione gave birth to a son, Robert James Potter. Their daughter Lily Rose followed at 0943. Both weigh around six pounds, a very healthy weight for twins. Hermione and her children are doing quite well and she's been moved to recovery with her babies. Visitors are welcome, if they promise to be quiet."

"Anything else?"

Angelina nodded. "Their official Birth Certificates will say they were born at 1756 on April 1st, 1995 at Hogwarts. Unofficially, they will celebrate their first birthday on September 2nd, 1995. They will be seven months old when Time Compression lifts."

"And Parvati?" Alicia asked.

"Still in labor," Angelina said. "Her water has not broken yet."

"So," Fred said, "to the score cards! House Potter is first out of the box and Hermione wins the baby pool! Or at least you win if you picked her first. Parvati appears to be second, but we'll keep you



posted. House Potter has its heir and for the second generation in a row, he has a Muggle Born mother."

"Fitting," George said.

"Indeed. And House Potter now has a boy and a girl to House Longbottom's two girls who are soon to join us."

"And with that," Alicia said, "we return you to the regularly scheduled programming."

Padma Shari Longbottom was born at 1507, Day 238 and her sister Penelope Elaine followed at 1512. Their official birth date was April 1st, 1995 at 1757, one minute after Hermione's children. Their unofficial first birthday would fall on September 2nd as well. Less than an hour later, Angela (Lee) Longbottom was admitted to the infirmary with contractions. Henry David Longbottom was born at 0423, Day 239 and his sister Jennifer Suzette at 0430. Officially, they were born on April 1st, 1995 at 1758 with their unofficial birthday being September 3rd. Thus the heirs to two of the oldest Ancient and Noble Houses were born to Muggle Born witches. Padma (Patil) Potter gave birth to Parvati Amira Potter at 0734, Day 240 and her sister Patricia Louise Potter at 0741. Officially, they were born at 1800 on April 1st with their first birthday falling on September 4th.

For two weeks all was quiet and the six baby girls and two baby boys were probably the most popular people in the Wing. Fortunately, they were far too young to understand such things or for it to go to their heads.

On Day 253 the calm ended when Tracey went into labor. Alan Richard Longbottom was born in the morning of Day 254, or 1808 on April 1st, 1995, with his unofficial birthday set for September 18th.

Neville's Susan gave birth to Edgar Thomas Bones in the morning of Day 255, at 1810 on April 1st, 1995 with his unofficial birthday set for September 19th, a date he would share with Hannah's son Charles Edward Abbott although he was officially born one minute later as he was born in the evening of Day 255. But House Abbott and Bones now had their heirs, both born on the same day and simulated day.

On Day 256, Marcia (Robbins) Potter gave birth to her daughter Julie Marie, officially at 1812 on April 1st and unofficially with her first birthday on September 20th.

Rosie (Rosier) Potter gave birth to James Sirius on the morning of Day 257, officially at 1814 on April 1st and unofficially September 21st. He would share his unofficial birthday with Hermione Luna Longbottom, the daughter of Ginny who was officially born the next minute of April 1st, 1995.

Day 258 was a busy day in the Infirmary. Lisa (Turpin) Longbottom gave birth to her daughter Elizabeth Anne and Katie (Bell) Potter her son Michael Colin in the morning (1816, April 1st) and Gabrielle (Delacour) Potter gave birth to her daughter Michelle Lauren that afternoon (1817, April 1st.) They would celebrate their unofficial birthdays on September 22nd.

Laura Caldwell gave birth to her son Edward Howard Longbottom the morning of Day 259, officially at 1818 on April 1st. His other birthday would be September 23rd. Luna followed her a day later with her own daughter Delilah Marie Potter, officially at 1820 on April 1st with her birthday set for September 24th.

September 26th would be the unofficial birthdays for Daphne's son David Edgar Potter and Michelle's daughter Maria Teresa Longbottom, born Day 261 or at 1822 and 1823 on April 1st respectively. Lucinda was the last to give birth. Her son, Lawrence Harold Longbottom was born Day 262 or at 1824, April 1st and would celebrate his first birthday on September 27th. There were no serious complications and all the twenty-two new residents of the Wing were healthy, if loud and tiring for their parents and grandparents. House Potter and House Longbottom were "tied" according to the Twins, with four boys and six girls each, while House Bones and Abbott each had a son.

## THE SOUTH WING - TIME COMPRESSION DAY 291.

Classes had resumed on Day 266. Lucinda and the others who had most recently given birth were not complaining too much. It had been a solid month off from classes and training and aside from the giving birth and getting used to being a new Mum, it was almost getting boring. With the resumption of classes, it was now clear to others why House Longbottom and Potter were separated from the other years. All one had to do was listen to Cho complain.

Aside from Magical Dueling, Herbology in the Greenhouse and Potions, the babies were with their Mum's in class. Those other classes were considered too risky for such young children given the spell casting, dangerous plants or the possibility of exploding cauldrons and even if that were not a factor there were the fumes. The other classes were considered safe. In fact, Healing was now about young children which would help the parents immensely and was now the best attended class in the Wing as the pregnant adult women and their husbands were attending as well. But with so many babies, there always seemed to be one young mother nursing her child as she scribbled notes, or was up and changing the child assuming her Husband was not. Most often, however, the young ones were asleep in their carriers. When their parents were off taking the less child safe classes, the babies were left with their grandparents or elves and it was then they usually had play time. Not that the young parents did not have similar time with their children, but this was the scheduled time during class days.

Harry and Neville were both trying their best to bond with their eleven children. It was not uncommon to see either of them with one of their kids in their arms. Their Witch of the Day brought their child or children into the Master Bedroom at night, so the two could not avoid the late night wailings which were worse with the two sets of twins as one would set the other off. But after a month or so, the babies were all sleeping through the night - most of the time. Harry had told his wives he loved bath time with the little ones, not that he was in the bath with them, he just thought it was a special time. He hated changing nappies, but did it diligently and efficiently after a time. He could not comprehend how something that small could create such a mess. He thanked past Magicals for cleaning spells and his new In-Laws for their help as well. But it was clear to everyone that Harry loved being a Husband and a Dad. The

Grangers saw it first and knew their daughter had done very well for herself in the end.

Magical training and dueling now included Apparition. Aside from Cho, all the Middle Years were legally adults and could take the licensing exams and besides, Apparition was a dueling tactic. The wards had been adjusted to allow it in the Magical Training Room and from there to the student apartments so they could practice. It remained suppressed everywhere else in the Wing. They had delayed the training because of the risk of Splinching, or leaving part of yourself behind. It was dangerous for a novice, pregnant witch. But now that the youthful pregnancies were over, the training began.

The Middle Years also moved into Animagus training. This was taught during both Transfiguration and Magical Training with Professor McGonagall and Sirius Black as instructors and was well attended by the other magical adults. But the best lecture was given by Amelia Bones...

"Animagus Registration is required by our law not because it is dangerous per se, but because it can be used for nefarious ends. If you develop a stealth form, such as an inconspicuous insect or small animal, you could use this to escape from a crime. Likewise, if you develop what Aurors call a combat form, your animal can harm or kill. The problem is, those who would most likely use their forms for ill, don't register. Mr. Black is an exception there as he has never used his form for ill purpose."

"Unless you count trying to kill Peter Pettigrew last year," Harry offered while his Godfather hung his head.

"But he didn't, did he?" Amelia replied. "The worst we can really say about that Dog was he used his form to both survive and escape from Azkaban Prison - where he had no business being in the first place. Fortunately, he did not kill Pettigrew. While we all hope Sirius can be vindicated without the Rat, having the Rat alive will certainly help with the current administration. That being said, I will not ask you all to register, just to let me know what you are so I can cover for you all if necessary. The purpose of registration is to prevent criminal activity, not to keep tabs on those who manage to use this magic otherwise."

"So we get back to it. You can't choose your form. But stealth forms - those that allow you to evade trouble..."

"Or spy on bad guys," Harry offered.

"Or that, are the best. Your best stealth forms are the ones people will ignore in context. Birds or flying insects are really good and birds the better as they can get away from trouble much more quickly, particularly if they are not unknown to this place. Cats - or should I say House Cats are good as well as they're common roaming about, as are squirrels and rabbits and other common wild animals that people tend not to notice. On the other side of the coin are the true combat forms - apex predators mostly: wolves, lions and tigers and bears and such. These forms lack stealth, but are dangerous to confront. In between are the less invisible and dangerous forms. Species that are hunted by Muggles are never a good form. Your father was a Stag, was he not?"

Harry nodded.

"A doe would have been a better option. Muggles hunt stags, and ducks, wild geese, pheasant, quail, rabbits, fox ... wolves if they are known to be about, and so on. Only the wolf is built to defend itself. Stags may not be too bad, but a hunter will shoot first whereas wolves are foreign and he may hesitate thinking it's just a dog."

The lecture went on but the point was clear. Some forms were better than others and Harry's dad's form was not on the better than others list. Moreover, she would not care about the forms of registration so long as she knew what they were. She would care even less if they refrained from "nefarious use" but felt it better not to define that in too much detail in case "You-Know-Who" was coming back. It did not really matter for now. As it took months to achieve an animagus form, the likelihood any would do so before the end of Time Compression was slim, but that did not discourage any of them from going forward with it.

Day 291 was actually a day off. For Harry, Hannah was his witch that night and Katie the Witch of the Day at breakfast. Harry was sitting with Hannah, Sirius, Marilyn and little Charlie Abbott at breakfast that morning, before Katie became his Witch, when it happened.

"OH BOTHER!" Rose Granger exclaimed loud enough for any in the room to hear, "MY WATER JUST BROKE!"

"Hannah?" Harry asked as Mr. and Mrs. Granger left the Main Dining Room with Hermione not far behind.

"Mum and Sirius told me yesterday, Harry. Their expecting as well. She's due around Day 430 or so. You'll be there for them?"

"Of course...."

"Then go. Be with the Grangers now."

"Katie?" Harry asked.

She shrugged. "Mum's due in about two months. Go Harry. We'll be down in a bit."

Harry nodded and headed off after the Grangers.

"Good luck, Mate," Neville said as Harry passed his table.

"Thanks, Nev," Harry replied.

Harry arrived in the Infirmary to find it empty. The Grangers were not there nor was Hermione nor anyone. He was beginning to panic when Katie arrived, followed by Luna, Daphne and Rosie.

"The others are coming," Katie said. "Where's Hermione and her parents?"

"I - I don't know," Harry said.

At that moment Hermione entered. She looked a little upset.

"Hermione?" Harry asked.

"I'm not the mother. I'm not the father. And I'm not a Healer!" she huffed. "I have to wait here."

"Your Mum?"

"She's in the Delivery Room with Dad, Healer Turpin and Mrs. Turpin."

"How is she?" Katie asked.

"They say she's fine, but she's pretty progressed. We probably won't have too long to wait."

But it was a long wait. Long enough that Hermione and Katie had to leave for a time to take care of their babies and put them to bed for the night - as did the other seven who joined the vigil. But they all returned later, the children under the care of their elves.

THE SOUTH WING - TIME COMPRESSION DAY 292.

At 0430 or so, the ten teens were awakened. They had been sleeping in the Infirmary beds. Robert Granger woke them up.

"D-Daddy?" Hermione asked sleepily. "Is something wrong?"

Robert Granger actually laughed. "No. You're mother has just given birth to a healthy pair of twins: your new brother Jason Louis and new sister Jennifer Ophelia."

"That's wonderful!" Harry said.

"But what took so long?" Hermione asked. "I mean it's been eight hours or more since her water broke!"

"Your mother was almost fully dilated and she decided to take a nap."

"A - SHE WHAT?"

"She took a nap!" Robert laughed. "Since the babies were otherwise fine, Healer Turpin let her be. She woke up and about an hour later, out they came. I swear little Jason was asleep too! Seemed right put out by being born when he was! It was SO different than when you came. I swear she was threatening to castrate me during some of the contractions. These two? Your Mum barely complained and then took a kip! Little Jason complained for a bit, but once he was swaddled, he was out like a light. Jenny, on the other hand... she seems to think this new world is totally cool!"

Healer Turpin came out with his wife pushing a wheelchair that held Rose Granger. Rose had a baby at her breast while Healer Turpin held the other. Robert collected the baby from the Healer and walked over to Hermione. "Meet your brother, Hermione: Jason - I can sleep through anything - Granger."

Sure enough, the little boy Hermione now held was fast asleep.

"He had a good feed," Rose said, "and nodded right off. This one, on the other hand, she's more interested in what's going on, just like her big sister."

Hermione walked over to her mother holding her new little sleeping brother. Jason was oblivious of everything, but little Jennifer soon finished feeding and seemed to be looking around in amazement. Hermione knew the little baby's eyesight was poor, for all newborns could barely see more than shapes and colors, but it seemed little Jennifer was taking it all in.

"Congratulations," Harry said to the Grangers.

"Thanks, Harry," Robert said beaming.

The Potter family spent several minutes meeting the sleeping Jason and seemingly curious Jennifer. Rose was soon in one of the beds with Robert by her side when one by one Harry and his wives said good night and headed up for their own beds. Hermione was soon the last remaining. She was still holding her brother.

"Yours are..." Robert began.

"Asleep, I hope, just like this little one." By now, little Jennifer had dozed off as well and was in a crib next to her mother as Hermione handed her brother off to his mother. "I can't believe we both had twins!"

"Must be the fertility potion," Rose chuckled. "Of course, now we will have to explain this to the relations. After all, these two will be about five months old when the real weekend ends."

"And we saw the relations at Christmas," Robert said.



"And before," Rose added. "I think they would note the fact I never looked pregnant when I should have. Considering these two will actually be one year old on October 25th despite being born at 2040 on April 1st... they'll be about five months old when we leave here."

Hermione shrugged. "So we tell them. So what? I'm a real witch. My son and daughter are magical as well as are these two. The relatives need to get used to that idea."

The elder Grangers nodded.

Hermione smiled. "You do know that my babies and yours will both grow up knowing about both worlds. I always intended that they would spend loads of time in the non-magical world, and now you have two who can also spend loads of time in this one."

"How?" Rose asked.

"We plan to run a Day Care of sorts here," Hermione said. "We have to really. While we can take our babies to classes in this Wing, I doubt that'll be a good idea outside in the rest of this school. It'll be run by the elves although I wouldn't be surprised if some of the parents help - I really should talk to Harry about assigning an Elf to you. It'll help when you leave here if you have one to look after these two little ones while you're at work and ... they can get them and you out if something bad should happen. What I'm really saying is, if we get this Day Care up and running, we invite you to send these two. We have plenty of time to figure out how."

The elder Grangers smiled. Robert walked up and hugged his daughter.

"We'll think about it," Robert said. "And I mean we will give it serious consideration. But for now, it's late and you need your sleep as well. I can take care of your Mum and these two..."

"Of course, Daddy," Hermione said and suddenly yawned. "A few hours," she added. She said her goodbyes and headed for her apartment.

THE SOUTH WING - TIME COMPRESSION DAY 318.

The First Exam Period began on Day 305. The "Upper Years" were sitting for their NEWTs, at least those NEWT courses they were taking before they entered Time Compression. They could elect to take additional NEWTs either now or at the end of Time Compression, so long as it was in one of the offered courses or, for the Sixth Years, they would take those exams next year. Most opted just to sit for their current NEWTs. The Lower Years had a different exam schedule altogether. They sat exams beginning Day 86 that were their "regular" end of year exams in First and Second Year courses. They resumed classes on Day 99 and would not sit for exams again until near the end of Time Compression when they would sit for their end of Third Year Exams in Charms, Defense, Herbology, Potions and Transfiguration and all would sit for their end of Third Year Exams in Ancient Runes and Arithmancy, if not Fourth Year.

The Middle Years all sat for their OWLs. This was probably easiest on the true Fifth Years as they had in effect a whole extra year to prepare, unless they had not been taking Arithmancy or Ancient Runes. For the Fourth Years, it was as if they had taken their fourth and fifth year courses, again unless they had not been taking Arithmancy or Runes. All of the Third Years were taking those courses, but they had to cover two years worth of material in the equivalent of a little more than one year of classes. They were arguably the most stressed of the students who filed into Classroom Number 4 on the morning of Day 305 to take their written Transfiguration OWL. The exams ended on Day 315 with Potions and they were now on a break before classes resumed on Day 320. To their surprise, Professor McGonagall and Madam Maxine called them back into Classroom 4 just after lunch.

"Welcome class," Professor McGonagall said sternly as the twenty-one students sat down. They could see the Official Examiners - Professors Marchbanks and Tofty were seated with their Deputy Headmistress, as were all their other Professors from the Wing. McGonagall had several envelopes in her hands. "I'm sure you all are wondering why I asked for you to be here?"

The students nodded.

"I have here your unofficial OWLs results..."

"U-unofficial? Y-you m-mean this wasn't real? They can change?" Hermione stammered.

"Oh these are quite real Ms. Granger," McGonagall said. "They can't be changed. They are 'Unofficial' because they are not yet recorded with the Ministry of Magic and are not yet part of your official school file. But these will be your official results by the end of April." Parents were filing in now, filling the empty desks and then lining the walls.

"First things first," McGonagall said, "all of you have the OWLs you need to continued to NEWT levels, even with Professor Snape's requirements."

The students all cheered.

"Hence, we will dispense with discussion of any marks below Exceeds Expectations and all of you achieved more Outstandings than Exceeds. I also need to point out that in the Outstanding mark we have three further gradations: With Distinction for all who achieved more than a perfect score, British or French Honors for those who achieved the highest score on that exam for their country in the last thirty years and International Honors for those who achieved the highest OWLs in the last thirty years from any of the signatory countries. As this exam was not administered in June with all the others, we cannot at this time inform any of you whether you otherwise might also have attained National Distinction, that being the highest mark in a subject for this exam year, but not so high as to warrant British or French Honors. And I mention this because it has happened more than once with you all."

"That being said," Remus added, "I wish to point out that while all of you attained an Outstanding in Defense Against the Dark Arts, Miss Chang did not achieve a With Distinction. I will work with her on the Partonus Charm to correct that deficiency, but she did get and Outstanding. As the rest of you did manage at least With Distinctions in Defense, you can assume that mark as a given. Professor McGonagall?"

"Miss Chang," McGonagall said handing Cho an envelope.

Cho opened her envelope and read her marks and smiled. "It's not perfect," she said, "but seeing as I had barely been scraping by in Herbology before and had not been taking Runes or Arithmancy, I

can't complain. I got Exceeds in those three, Outstandings in Defense and Potions and With Distinctions in Charms and Transfiguration. Cedric will be pleased!"

"Those are very respectable marks, Miss Chang," McGonagall said. "I dare say that if you do even nearly as well on your remaining OWLS, you might well achieve all twelve OWLS seeing as you are taking Care of Magical Creatures, Divination and Muggle Studies." Those were in addition to the two other required courses in History of Magic and Astronomy. "Miss Abbott?" she added after Cho received an ovation.

Hannah opened her envelop. "Exceeds in Arithmancy and Herbology," she said, "Outstandings in everything else and With Distinction in Defense! Mum and Sirius will be so pleased! Does this mean I get out of having to take the others?"

McGonagall shook her head. "Astronomy and History of Magic are mandatory, I'm afraid, and the school will only allow you to drop one elective at this point."

"Divination then," Hannah said. "If I have to make up one more nonsensical dream, I'll go barmy!"

"And I thought only Ron and I did that!" Harry said.

"PLEASE!" Parvati said. "Almost everyone does! And Lavender is quite put out knowing that you do that and have the highest marks for your Dream Log."

"That's because each of my fake dreams probably could be called a nightmare, with each night getting worse, culminating in a slow, violent and painful death in the last installment. Professor Trelawney seems to be into that stuff ... at least where I'm concerned. I can drop Divination too, can't I Professor McGonagall?"

"I am aware of your OWL results, Mr. Potter. I can see no reason why you need to continue with that class," McGonagall replied. Everyone knew she did not think highly about that course. "Congratulations on your marks, Miss Abbott." After a round of applause, McGonagall handed a letter to Tracy Davis.

"Exceeds in Arithmancy and Runes," she said. "I'm rather disappointed at the Runes mark."

"It is good enough to move forward with the class, Miss Davis." McGonagall said.

Tracy nodded. "Outstandings in everything else and With Distinctions in Defense and Potions!"

"Excellent marks, Miss Davis!" McGonagall said. "Miss Parvati Patil!"

Parvati opened her letter. "Exceeds in Arithmancy and Runes. Oh well. I kinda hoped to do better in Runes. WOW! Outstandings in everything else and With Distinctions in Charms and Defense!"

"I dare say," Professor Flitwich began, "that you all are probably my best Charms class ever!"

"Those are excellent marks, Miss Patil," McGonagall said. "Before I hand out the next one, let me say this. We on faculty in the Wing were concerned about your aggressive education plan. Many of you have sat for OWLs in Arithmancy and Runes even though you were not taking them as electives so you had to cover three years of material in a little over a year's worth of classes. We were particularly concerned with our Third Years, as they also had to cover two years of material in all five of the other classes. That being said, our concerns seem unjustified. Onto our first Third Year Miss Rosier!"

Rosie took her letter and opened it. "Wow! Exceeds in Arithmancy and Herbology ... sorry Neville."

"No worries," Neville said. "Regardless of that mark, I have no problem with you in my Greenhouse."

"And the mark is high enough to continue on for your NEWTs, Miss Rosier, should you choose to do so," Professor Sprout said.

Rosie nodded. "All the others are outstanding, and I got With Distinctions in Defense, Potions and Transfiguration!"

"For the record," McGonagall said, "the lot of you are without a doubt the strongest OWL Transfiguration class it has ever been my privilege to teach! Miss Robbins."

Marcia opened her letter. "Exceeds in Arithmancy - I can't say I'm surprised as that's a tough course. Exceeds in Runes is a little disappointing. I have Outstandings With Distinction in everything else except Herbology and Potions which are just Outstandings."

"Custom dictates I read this next one," McGonagall said. "Miss Weasley, were this a normal OWL term, I would visit your parents personally to deliver these results. Fortunately, your brothers and father have just joined us. You attained and Exceeds in Arithmancy and Ancient Runes, Outstandings in Potions and Herbology, With Distinctions in Defense and Transfiguration and last, but not least," she paused. "Congratulations, Miss Weasley. You have earned International Honors in Charms!"

Ginny looked shocked. "I ... it can't ... none of my brothers ever..."

"Way to go Gin!" Bill said.

"Knew you'd do it!" Fred said.

"You were wicked with a wand at age seven," George added.

"Hence the reason why we have not used you as a prank test dummy since then," Fred added.

"Seven OWLs to date, and you're just a Third Year," Arthur added. "This should go a long way with your mother. We found out this morning Fred and George picked up their three NEWTs each and four more OWLs on top of it."

"Although we did not do that well," Fred added.

"Those are indeed excellent marks, Miss Weasley. Should you decide to continue your education in your other classes after taking those OWLs in the spring of '97, do not be surprised if you find a Prefect's Badge with that year's letter," McGonagall said with a smile.

"Our little Gin-Gin," Fred began.

"A Prefect?" George bemoaned.

"Oh the shame!"

"We have failed mightily with her, my Brother."

"Oh hush you two!" Ginny said. "I am not Percy!"

"Nope," Fred said.

"Definitely not," George added.

"You would mostly hex us first and deduct points later!"

"And you don't have to worry about that," Ginny said. "It's not like you'll be in school when I'm in Fifth Year!"

"Too true," Fred said.

"Boys," Arthur began. They stopped their antics. "Congratulations, Ginny."

"Thanks Dad," Ginny replied softly.

"If we can move on," McGonagall said impatiently. "Per custom, I shall now read Mr. Longbottom's scores. Mr. Longbottom as Exceeds in Arithmancy and Runes. He achieved and Outstanding in Transfiguration. Given that you were barely passing before, Mr. Longbottom, that is quite an improvement."

Neville nodded. "I have a wand that works for me now."

"Whether it is the wand or not," McGonagall said, "what I have noticed is a marked increase in your confidence in yourself and your abilities and your OWL results bear that out. You also managed With Distinctions in Charms, Defense and Potions, the later being the biggest surprise."

Neville shrugged. "No Professor Snape," he said.

"Be that as it may, well done. Finally, I wish to congratulate you for your International Honors in Herbology."

"We expected no less," Susan said.

"Neville's right brilliant in that," Lucinda added proudly. "If all of us Longbottoms got Outstandings in Herbology, no doubt it was because of our Neville."

"Well said," Tracy added. "And it's no surprise about his Potions mark given the relation between the two subjects..."

"And no Snape," Parvati added.

"Very well done, Mr. Longbottom," Professor Sprout added. "I note that not one student in this Wing has failed to be able to advance to NEWT levels and I know this is due to your efforts, young man. Minerva? I am going to place a letter in Mr. Longbottom's permanent file suggesting that if he continues in this field, I am recommending him as my potential replacement for when I decide to retire. Do not worry, Neville, I still have a few years left in me."

"I will be submitting a similar letter on behalf of Miss Weasley," Professor Flitwick said, "provided she goes on to her Charms Mastery, of course."

"But...", Hermione began. "Oh this is unprecedented! Only Professor Dumbledore received such a letter before he took his NEWTs!"

"How do you know that?" Fred asked.

"It's in Hogwarts: A History," Hermione said, "and a few other books as well."

There was a long applause for Neville and Ginny. "May we move on?" McGonagall asked. "Right then, Mr. Potter. You attained Exceeds in Arithmancy and Herbology..."

"Probably got nailed on the written portion of that one," Harry said mostly to Neville.

"You have made an Outstanding in Ancient Runes," McGonagall continued.

"Whoa!"



"With Distinctions in Charms, Transfiguration and Potions..."

"With Distinction?" Harry asked in surprise.

"It is indeed a vast improvement," McGonagall said, "particularly in Potions."

"Professors Turpin and Longbottom ... they really know how to make it make sense," Harry said referring to their two potions instructors: Lisa's Mum, the now visibly pregnant Cynthia Turpin and Neville's Gran. It was a no nonsense class, but there was none of Snape's bullying or any of that. "One of them suggested I should think of it like cooking, at least the practical part of it, and it all clicked then."

"Be that as it may," McGonagall said, "you did quite well. And last, but not least, you achieved International Honors in Defense Against the Dark Arts."

"Whoa!" Harry said. "That's unbelievable!"

"Mr. Potter," McGonagall said, "you defeated a Mountain Troll as a short, eleven year old who knew nothing of magic First Year. You killed a basilisk in your Second Year. You drove off over one hundred dementors in your Third and destroyed five of them at least. Then there's this year. Regardless of why your in this Tournament, it is now clear you ... well, I won't say belong ... you're not out of your depth. You have already done more than most witches and wizards alive, regardless of their age! To think you'd do any less on your Defense OWLs ... I expected no less, to be honest. For me, it is your other marks that ... that make me proud to be one of your teachers. Not one student in this Wing is performing below and Outstanding level in Defense, and we know you're helping them! Their marks, like the marks most of you have received in Herbology thanks to Mr. Longbottom, are a reflection upon you and your abilities and willingness to share them. And let's not forget your increasingly formidable skills as a duelist. I, for one, am not surprised at that result. It is the others you achieved. A letter will be placed in your file as well. Merlin knows you'd be a better choice for Defense Professor right now than Quirrel or Lockhart."

Harry could not or would not respond. Even if he wanted to, the applause he was receiving would have prevented it.

"You need not worry, Mr. Potter," McGonagall continued. "As tempting as it might be, I would not recommend you for that position for at least a few years yet. This is - as the Muggles say - something for down the road as it were. I think it best that I continue to read the scores for the rest of the class. Miss Lee?"

"Yes Professor?" Andrea replied.

"You attained and Exceeds in Runes, otherwise they were all Outstandings and With Distinction in Defense," she said handing Andrea her letter. "Miss Turpin?"

"Yes Ma'am?" Lisa replied.

"Same marks as Miss Lee. Congratulations!"

"Thank you, Professor," Lisa said as she received her marks. She was actually quite pleased with them, although by now everyone had figured out the announcement was by class rank from bottom to top.

"Miss Lovegood," McGonagall said. "Were it not for Miss Weasley's Charms score, you would have International Honors. She edged you by only a point. Good job."

"Thank you, Professor," Luna said. "But I don't want a letter in my file about this."

"Miss Lovegood," Professor Flitwick said, "there shall be such a letter, but it is merely a recommendation. It does not commit you or anyone to teaching either here or in that discipline. As I understand it, your real focus is more as the Naturalist like your father and not the Spell Crafter like your mother, am I right?"

Luna nodded.

"Then, as I assume you will do very well on your Care of Magical Creatures OWLs in a couple of years, you can expect a similar letter from me in regards to that course. It is the least I can do for you seeing as I failed you for three years."

"Failed me, Professor?" Luna asked in confusion, a rare state for her.

"I have learned since coming here of your treatment at the hands of my House and it is ... abominable! In this Wing, we have four who were not part of that at all and have already begun to do what should have been done the last two years and stand up for you, and we have a fourth who, I assume, will do so."

"It was just fun," Luna began.

"No, Miss Lovegood," Professor Flitwick said. "It was cruelty of the worst sort for students short of out right hexing! It is not something I would ever have tolerated! To steal your things? Maybe you did not value them, but what if you had? Would you let a friend suffer such indignities?"

"No Sir," Luna said. "Not my friends! But..."

"No 'Buts'!" Professor Flitwick exclaimed. "The Prefects then should have dealt with this your First Year and they failed to do so or chose not to! Miss Caldwell was the first and only Prefect to try, as I understand it, and that's unacceptable - not for her part, but for the others! Your roommates should have stood up for you rather than let that happen or take part in it! And yet, as I now believe, they were active participants in the abuse! I dare say, save for those of you who are in this Wing now, House Ravenclaw will soon see why it's not wise to piss me off!"

"Professor, I am fine with," Luna began.

"NO! Miss Lovegood, while I admire your spirit, this has far less to do with you than to deal with the issues that gave rise to You-Know-Who. Ravenclaw was second after Slytherin in producing Death Eaters and I will not allow that to happen again! He was all about superiority! Dumbledore be damned, not again! The five of you here, if belatedly, showed true loyalty to each other as have the others in the Lower Year who are with us. We may pride ourselves as Ravenclaws on our intellect, but loyalty and friendship... That is where true genius lies. You cannot do it all alone, whatever 'all' is. Professor McGonagall tells the lot of you that your House is your family, and yet one of my daughters is treated so and until recently none of her sisters have stood up for her? My Prefects didn't even bother to tell me, aside from Miss Caldwell? Even that was recent and even then they are in the minority? Unacceptable! The rest of

Ravenclaw will soon learn a most harsh lesson and, Miss Lovegood, it's not about you! I'm a quarter Goblin on my mother's side. Ravenclaw shall soon know why that is something they should have thought about!"

"Honestly," Luna said, "I had all but forgotten about that. It seems like that was another life altogether. Besides, I live here now. I seriously doubt I'll be back in the dorms at all, what with little Delilah and all."

"Be that as it may, it should never have happened in the first place," McGonagall said, "now, if we could get back on task here?"

After a moment of silence, McGonagall continued. "I turn over this honor to Madam Maxine of Beauxbatons for the next two students. Madam Maxine."

"Merci, Professor McGonagall," she said in only moderately accented English. Either her English had improved markedly while living in the Wing, or she had been faking it these past several months.

"Mademoiselle Gabrielle Delacour," she said. Just like the British witches, it had been decided to address Gabrielle and Michelle by their maiden names when any two or more of their sister wives were present to avoid any confusion. "As you are aware from this morning, your sister Fleur received her NEWT scores and did quite well. Let us now see how you did." Madam Maxine opened the envelope, although it was clear to just about everyone she already knew the results. "Mademoiselle Delacour has received and Exceeds Expectations in Arithmancy. She has an Outstanding in Charms and Herbology. She received With Distinctions in Defense Against the Dark Arts and Potions. And last, but not least, she has attained French National Honors in Ancient Runes and Transfiguration. You certainly have brought honor to our school and your families Mademoiselle Delacour."

After a long applause, led mainly by House Potter and Gabrielle's parents and sister, Madam Maxine moved on. "Mademoiselle Michelle Marcella," she called out. "Mademoiselle Marcella has received an Exceeds Expectations in Arithmancy. She has an Outstanding in Herbology. She received With Distinctions in Ancient Runes, Charms and Transfiguration. Finally, she has attained

French National Honors in Defense Against the Dark Arts and Potions. Congratulations, Mademoiselle Marcella. You too have done honor to your school and your families."

She continued when the applause and congratulations died down. "Now, as proud as I am of these young ladies, there is a problem to deal with. They are, after all, students at Beauxbatons and not Hogwarts. Yet, because of their new families, to ask them to return to France next year would be unjust. I have spoken with Professor McGonagall, Monsieur Delacour with our French Ministry, Signore Marcella of the Italian Ministry, Mademoiselle Granger and others about this. We are looking into the possibility of setting up an exchange of sorts between Hogwarts, Beauxbatons and the Institute of Magic in Rome. Students would live at their home school - or in the case of Mademoiselles Delacour and Marcella, here in the South Wing - and attend many of their classes there. But they would also have the option of floo travel between the schools and attending classes at the other two schools and other activities as well. At the very least, we could allow for a student Quidditch League but there are other possibilities and opportunities we wish to explore. Naturally, language abilities will be important if you should attend class in another country. That being said, there are possible activities and exchanges where language is less important. For now, Mademoiselles Delacour and Marcella shall live here next year and attend some classes in France at the very least. But we hope they shall not be the only ones."

"Why didn't we have this sort of thing before?" Harry asked.

"But we did," Madam Maxine replied. "The Tri-Wizard Tournament is but one example, although we have not yet reached the best examples which occurred after the Statute of Secrecy."

"But this Tournament is not really an exchange," Harry replied. "It's just a silly contest and what we were told about why it started was mostly rubbish! We were told it was between the three preeminent magical schools in Europe when it started, but back in the Thirteenth Century, Hogwarts and Beauxbatons were merely among such schools - still are - and Durmstrang could not have been considered in that league! There was the Athenian School, dating from the fifth century BCE and the Italian school you mentioned dating from the third, although it's had several names since. There was also by then Cordoba in what is now Spain, and Florence and Milan, to name but

a few. At that time and today, as I've now learned in your History lessons, there were and are five schools of magic in the British Isles, although the other four are newer than Hogwarts: one in England, Wales, Ireland and Scotland which were separate countries at the time. There were and are six schools in France. Yours is the oldest, but by then there was one near Calais..."

"Which at the time was technically English," Madam Maxine said, "as was the one in Aquitaine."

"But there was also Marseilles, Lyon and Avignon. While Hogwarts and Beauxbatons were 'preeminent,' the real reason was that the Headmaster of Durmstrang set the tournament up to prevent a war between Magical France and England and as Hogwarts was in Scotland - on 'neutral ground' - yet had half or more of its students from England, it made the best sense. At the time, and aside from joining together for Crusades, the Muggles in England and France were almost always at war with each other and the Magicals were thinking of throwing their own lot into that mix and damn the risk."

"Very good, Monsieur Potter," Madam Maxine said. "I see you paid attention."

"Wasn't hard," Harry said. "You and our other History teachers are not drop dead boring like Professor Binns."

"I never understood why Dumblydore keeps a ghost on staff," Madam Maxine said. "Then again, it's not like a ghost needs to be paid. Anyway, even a thousand years ago, students from one place would often attend school somewhere else. Durmstrang, for example, has students from Germany among other places, even though it lies in the Caucasus in what was once Russia but is now Georgia. We have students from many countries at Beauxbatons, Italy and Spain, but others as well. There was a time, however, then there was real exchange between schools. A student might spend five or six of his or her years at one school and a year or two in another country. That time occurred after the Statute of Secrecy when our magical economy improved."

"In fact," McGonagall said, "there were times when Hogwarts hosted a significant number of foreign students from France and elsewhere. This Wing was known as Beauxbatons West when I was in school. It had a large number of students from France fleeing the Muggle War

and Grindelwald and his followers. This was a safe place, France was not. They were not sorted into our Houses, but had for all practical purposes their own House and teachers."

"What happened?" Harry asked. "Why is it this Tournament is the first time I even heard of other schools?"

"The Continent and Britain no longer truly get along," McGonagall said. "We here stayed out of the Grindelwald war, aside from allowing in refugees and such. It wasn't until the Muggles had destroyed most of Europe in their war that we finally ... engaged, and even then it was on a small scale. Even though Professor Dumbledore's involvement ended that war, our neighbors would prefer to have little to do with us as they still feel we abandoned them. Though in our own recent troubles with Voldemort and his Death Eaters..." McGonagall shrugged.

"We feel you are willing to allow such dark times to return," Madam Maxine said. "Not all of us, mind you, but enough. My school currently does have an exchange program with Rome and Cordova. We had one with Hogwarts fifty years and more ago. Magical Britain abandoned us back then. Dumblydore was one of the few not to truly do so, but he is not Magical Britain despite his titles and positions. It is most unfortunate. Perhaps if there had been more foreign exchanges, the Death Eaters may not have found this school fertile ground for recruitment."

"It is perhaps true," McGonagall said. "I never agreed with not trying to re-establish our former ties with the Continent, but our Headmaster - while supportive of the notion - had other things of higher importance such as our last War and, more recently, Mr. Potter," she said with a shrug. "Of the five schools in Britain, we are the smallest by about a hundred students and while every school produced at least some Death Eaters, we produced the majority. No one House was immune, but..."

"Slytherin was the worst," Daphne said.

McGonagall nodded. "We have the smallest percentage of Muggle Borns of the five schools. Perhaps, if our numbers were higher..." she shrugged again.

"Why the smallest?" Hermione asked.

"Over one in four magicals are Muggle Born. There are thirty-nine students in your year, Miss Granger. How many are Muggle Born?"

"There's Dean and Sally-Anne," Hermione began.

"Mr. Thomas is probably not truly one," McGonagall said. "Once a Muggle Mother has a magical child, the later ones tend to be as well, provided they are by the same father. Mr. Thomas's brother and sisters are at least four years younger than he is and none are magical. We also know Mr. Thomas's parents married when he was about a year or so old. We believe it possible that Mr. Thomas's real father was not a Muggle ... it fits but without asking it cannot be proven. Who else?"

"Megan Jones in Hufflepuff and Justin Finch-Fletchly," Hermione said. "Anthony Goldstein in Ravenclaw. I think that's it."

"Miss McDougal from Ravenclaw is also one despite her pretenses otherwise. That's five out of nearly forty, when it should be about ten. Miss Jones is from Wales. Miss McDougal from Scotland. Mr. Goldstein, while not Irish, his family lives in Dublin. Like you, Mr. Finch-Fletchly is from England, but his parents paid handsomely for him to attend Hogwarts. They'd already had the money set aside to send him to Eton after all. His name was originally down for Kings' College of Magic - the English school. Roughly ten percent of our students here are Muggle Borns. They are assigned to us at random, an equal number from each of the other school regions. The rest are either legacies - from families that have sent their children here for ages - or paid extra to send their children here, or like Miss Chang and the Patils, were not born in this land and paid to send them here rather to the Scottish and English schools where they otherwise would have been assigned.

"It is not, as some would think, Salazar Slytherin's fault that Muggle Borns are disproportionate, nor that Purebloods are disproportionate in the other way," McGonagall explained. "A third of your students in your year and House are Purebloods. Hufflepuff, it's lower. Ravenclaw, it's four students, one higher than Gryffindor and in Slytherin it's nine of ten. Almost half of your class is Pureblood. I would note that your year is exceptional to that degree, but I would add that Purebloods are not represented in proportion to their



percentage of the total population given that they are, as a whole, not more than about fifteen percent."

"Then why?" Hermione began.

"It is an old school and not a national one to be honest. The others are required to take in any magical children in their boundaries. Hogwarts, while originally open to any magical children and while it technically still is, has a lot of legacy families from all four Houses. Then there was the added problems that at the time the school was founded an efficient means of locating all Muggle Borns did not exist. That came centuries later. Add to it that most of the forms of magical travel we take for granted did not exist and it was difficult even in the beginning to bring all the Muggle Borns here. While apparition did exist, few attempted it over any real distance not that they could not, but rather because there was nothing like today's Magical Reversal Squad to set them to rights if they splinched. Floo travel in any form, much less as we know it today, did not exist before the late Thirteenth Century. Portkeys are even more recent creations and the Hogwarts Express as we know it was first introduced in 1887.

"Before then, all students had to make their ways from their homes to Hogwarts by other means, none of which were particularly safe. The fastest was to take a boat to what is now Glasgow or Inverness and then make your way overland. Even then, it could take weeks to get here. When each of the National Schools opened, it was simply more convenient for the children to attend closer to home. As a result, we only had a few Muggle Borns, mostly from wealthy families which, back then, meant their nobility just as most of our other young charges were by then coming from old and mostly wealthy magical families. Why would a less affluent family send their child all the way from Devon - let's say - to the north of Scotland when there was a school a couple of days journey away?

"A former Headmaster in the Seventeenth Century required that we take in Muggle Borns each year regardless, seeing that most if not all were by then attending the other schools. By then the transportation problems were mostly a thing of the past. Students arrived by Floo and new Muggle Born students could be given Portkeys. But our Board of Governors, while not all Pureblood Elitists, are all Purebloods. The majority of them are either like Lucius Malfoy - who took this position for the influence it carried - and believe that Muggle Borns have no real right to attend, or like Tyson Crusoe,

who merely objects to needed to subsidize their educations as well as the less wealthy legacy families."

"So the Board of Governors is to blame for the disparity?" Hermione asked.

"More so than the Headmasters, although a few of them were of little help in that regard and even Dumbledore is far from perfect given that it was he who banned Muggle parents from visiting the school after some complaints about the 'conditions'," McGonagall said. "But it is the Board that controls such policies."

"And that is something we can change," Neville said. "We can't sack teachers, or Dumbledore, as the Heirs, but we can sack them!."

"I definitely want to see Lucius Malfoy get the sack," Harry said.

"I'd love to see how Draco reacts without his father being in a position to cover for the git," Daphne added.

"Actually, we probably could sack Professor Binns, seeing as he's already dead," Susan noted. "But this is all academic for now. We've got a hundred thirty and more days left before we return to real time and even then, aside from certain members of the Board, there's not much we really should do immediately as we are in a school year. More immediate will be getting our Wizengamot vote proxies in order as, if there's going to be any effective fallout, it will come mostly from that body and we have enough votes in theory to at least stall them indefinitely if not block any such moves altogether. Then there's this whole issue about how Voldemort has managed not to die we need to get to researching now that our OWLs are over."

"Yes, well this is all very well and good," McGonagall said, "but we're here about your OWLs, and there are seven of you left. The remaining seven of you all received straight Outstandings! Well done. That being said, I will announce only those With Distinction or better. Miss Bell?"

"Yes Professor?"

"You earned With Distinctions in Defense and Transfiguration! Very well done indeed."

"Thank you, Professor.

"Miss Greengrass? You earned With Distinctions in Charms, Defense, Potions and Transfiguration! Outstanding work!"

Daphne shrugged but smiled. "As you haven't called Hermione, Susan or Padma, it means I'm fourth in my year."

"Given the level of performance we have seen across the board, that is nothing to be disappointed about, Miss Greengrass. Miss Bones? The only one here who did as well or better across the board was Miss Granger. Miss Bones received With Distinctions in everything except Herbology. What she did not achieve, which all of our remaining four have, was Honors level. Those are exceptional marks none the less, Miss Bones."

"Not Herbology?" Neville asked.

"It is seldom possible to get higher than and Outstanding in our field on OWLs," Professor Sprout said. "We don't offer 'extra credit' during the exam as many others do. To stand above a perfect score, we take into account your body of work to date, if we can and in your case we could. In your case, there was the paper you wrote on Gillyweed and submitted following the Second Task and your Greenhouse here in this Wing."

"I had help with that."

"Indeed," Professor Sprout said. "I understand Mr. Potter is quite the gardener. But you were the Herbologist-in-Charge. You decided what to grow where and how, and let's not forget your Mandrakes." She then looked at the others. "As my students here all know, during Second Year one of our tasks is to re-pot young Mandrakes and you all remember how that went."

There were chuckles.

"Imagine my surprise our third class week here when I taught that lesson and had all the Muggle parents in the classroom watching when we pulled our Mandrakes and - well there were a couple that were a bit whiny, but the others either cooed softly or seemed to be asleep through the whole process. Given that I had warned the

Muggle parents about what to expect, it was a bit of a let down for them. So I asked Mr. Longbottom and he said he was running and experiment. He figured the reason the Mandrakes were so nasty when pulled from the ground was the shock of it all. So, the night before my class, he placed a Calming Drought in his fertilizer mix and used it on the plants. No one ever thought of doing that! That's Mastery Level stuff, that is. Hence his honors, and well deserved as well although I am still waiting for your paper on that, Mr. Longbottom."

"It's done," Neville said. "My ladies are going over it for spelling and such. You'll have it in a week or less."

"That'll be fine, Mr. Longbottom."

"Continuing?" McGonagall asked. When everyone nodded their agreement, she did. "Miss Caldwell? With Distinctions in Charms, Defense and Transfiguration. Congratulations, Miss Caldwell, you earned British National Honors in Arithmancy."

There was applause, the loudest coming from House Longbottom. "Miss Padma Patil," McGonagall continued. "You have With Distinctions in Ancient Runes, Charms, Defense and Transfiguration. Congratulations, Miss Patil. You tied Miss Caldwell in Arithmancy, thus you too have earned National Honors."

Now loudest and longest applause was from Parvati, followed by House Potter. "Miss Urquhart," McGonagall called. "You earned With Distinctions in Arithmancy, Ancient Runes and Defense. Congratulations, Miss Urquhart. You earned International Honors in Potions."

"Ooooh," a voice said, "Professor Snape's gonna have kittens one way or the other!"

"Miss Greengrass?" McGonagall asked seeing who had spoken.

"At the beginning of every year we get the same lecture from him," Daphne said. "My First year, it was how could we win the House Cup the year before and still finish dead last of the four houses on our OWLs. Since then, he's also been on about the Cup, but it's the OWLs that get him all riled. We do well in potions, he says, but quote 'fuck all' enquote in just about everything else. HE got straight

Outstandings, several With Distinction and British Honors in Potions. No one has attained honors since him."

"How can we call ourselves the best House," Lucinda continued, "if we are the only one that has to hold back students and are at the bottom on our OWLs? It's not every one of us, but enough! One thing I think he's right about each year: we cannot expect to be successful just because we're Slytherins or Purebloods or from respectable families. We have to work to succeed. And yet every year, as a whole our House mates fail to perform outside of his class. His point was that no one has equaled his results since 1976 - the year he took his OWLs and I just beat him, at least in those classes."

"He'll need a new lecture point next year, given our results," Tracey said.

"Then again," Rosie said, "maybe not. Everyone else in Slytherin doesn't consider us true Slytherins and arguably we're not anymore. We are Potters and Longbottoms!"

McGonagall nodded. "Last, but certainly not least, Miss Granger. As I said before, she achieved at least a With Distinction in everything except Herbology..."

"Which probably bugs her," one of the Weasley Twins said.

"... and we explained why that was the case," McGonagall continued. "Congratulations, Miss Granger. You received International Honors in Ancient Runes. Then again, given the warding work you either did or supervised in this Wing, anything less would have been a disappointment. What really makes me proud is that you have also received International Honors in Transfiguration. Well done! All four of you shall also receive letters suggesting you be considered at some time in the future as professors in those disciplines. Miss Patil and Miss Granger will receive two, as Miss Patil was just behind Miss Granger in Ancient Runes. Miss Bones will also receive a letter due to the fact that only Miss Urquhart outperformed her in Potions.

"I believe I speak for all of your Professors in this Wing. We are proud of all of you and you should all be proud of your results."

"Party tonight!" one of the Weasley Twins called out.

"And I get to dance the night away with my Harry," Katie added. She was, after all, Harry's Witch of the Day. "Assuming, of course, little Michael cooperates," she added.

## THE SOUTH WING - TIME COMPRESSION DAY 363.

At nine o'clock in the evening of Day 229, Time Compression stopped. It was just at sunset in the high, Scotland latitude and for once real night fell over the Wing. Before, the windows had been charmed to allow for an artificial nighttime inside. So long as one did not step out on the balcony, it appeared to be nighttime, when outside it was still day. But now, it was night in both worlds. At six the next morning, Time Compression resumed. April 1st had become April 2nd.

After the Grangers, there had been a long break between births, but the baby boom resumed on Day 228. Sira Patil gave birth to a son named Pasha, and ever since Padma and Parvati's father learned his wife was to have a boy, his whole attitude about what had happened changed. Pasha would celebrate his simulated birthday on December 1st. Daphne's mother had the first of the children to be born on April 2nd. Marcus Greengrass was born on day 300, not long after Time Compression resumed and would be a year old on December 3rd. Rosie's mother Agnes followed with a son named Vincent on day 338. Katie's mother had twins on Day 345: a daughter Annette and a son Edward and Tracy's mother Jasmine had a daughter they named Samantha on day 358. That little girl would be the last to celebrate her assimilated first birthday in 1995 as her modified date was December 31st. They would not be the last births in the Wing. Lisa, Andrea, Laura and Lucinda were all expecting to have a new brother or sister before Time Compression ended, and Hannah was expecting to meet her half-brother or half-sister as well as her mother and Step-father Sirius were expecting as well.

Classes had resumed on Day 320. For the Upper and Middle Years, lessons had changed. For the Upper Years, they no longer attended classes where they had already attained their NEWTs. They continued only in their new post OWL lessons with the goal of getting them through the end of Sixth Year by the end of Time Compression. This meant they all had a fair amount of time off. The three older Champions used this time for additional training, while the Weasley Twins used it for product development having been promised a quite significant investment in their not yet existing company. Harry and Neville had both offered them a thousand Galleons each and, while they were the largest investors, they were not the only ones. They were currently being assisted in their work

by Sirius Black, when he was not busy pampering his pregnant wife or with other things and by Jason Lee and Daniel Urquhart, the "First Years" who had declared they were the rightful heirs to the Weasley Twins when they were not otherwise involved in classes.

For the Middle Years, things were very different. Having passed their OWLs, it was decided that while training would continue and would include NEWT level and beyond materials, only their lessons in Potions, Healing and History would truly continue. The later two were because they were not technically OWL or better classes as the History lessons were not what had been approved by the British Magical Education and Examining Board and Healing was not even offered. They continued with Potions for two reasons. The first was that none of them ever wanted to take a class with Snape again if it could be avoided. The second was that one of the Sixth Year lessons was about poisons and antidotes which they all agreed was worth knowing. They all now knew how to apparate and were learning to use that skill in duels and they were also continuing with their Animagus training which had begun once classes resumed following their own Baby Boom. Still, aside from their three classes, everything else was covered in their extended magical training sessions. The result was they had far more free time than before. Naturally some of it was spent with their children, but they now could return to various research projects that had been neglected so far.

Day 363 was the first day of a two day weekend in the Wing. For Harry, it seemed that the days off from training and lessons were the only days he really got to spend any time with his children and that bugged him. True, he saw all of his children every day and spend a little time with them every day, but during the week if he managed more than a few minutes with each child it was rare.

Harry's oldest were now a little over four months old and his youngest were a little over three months old. Fortunately, they all had hair now which made it much easier to tell them apart. Only Padma's twins were born with hair you could actually see and for a while it seemed that a bald baby was still a bald baby.

Okay, he admitted, he could tell them apart even when they were bald. At the very least, he could use the Weasley Twin method which was you knew who it was by the witch they were with. But he also could tell Parvati apart from her twin sister Pattie very early on as well, provided he was wearing his glasses. To most, they looked



alike and a lot like their mother with their dark hair, eyes and skin but if you knew where to look, you could tell. Pattie had a more pronounced dimple on her left cheek than her sister.

In addition to being a boy and a girl, aside from their eyes - they both had their mother's eyes, they were very different. Bobbie, as Robert was called - had black hair like his Dad and Lily's was almost the same shade of brown as her mother. Although recently, Harry, Hermione and others noticed the hair on both children was starting to curl.

Hannah's son Charlie had light brown hair. Hannah said it was "Dirty Blonde" whatever that meant. He also had blue eyes like his Mum. Katie's son Michael was a red-head like his grandmothers on both sides. He was one of the few who seemed to have inherited Harry's eyes. They were calling Rosie's son "Jamie" in part because James seemed too stuffy for the boy. He had red hair and blue eyes much like his mother's.

Luna's daughter Delilah looked a lot like Luna, Harry thought, although Mr. Lovegood said her eyes were more like Luna's mother's eyes. Gabrielle's daughter Michelle was blond haired and blue eyed. Then again, she was Veela and that was a Veela trait. Marcia's daughter Julie had brown hair as Harry saw it. Marcia called it auburn as it was redder than brown. Julie also had Harry's green eyes.

The only one who looked more like Harry than his Mum was Daphne's son David. He had black hair like his father and both of his grandfathers and Harry's eyes. The Twins had joked that it took Harry nine tries to "get it right." Harry had tried to point out that David was the last to be born, not the last to be conceived. If one went in order of the wives, David was second to last. If one went by probable conception date, he was average, neither the first nor the last although they all were probably conceived within a week of each other. But the joke proved more popular than reality.

Days off such as this one were the only days when Harry was able to spend a fair amount of time with each of his children. On class days, he was lucky if he got to change all of their nappies or hold them all for a minute or two. Most of his "Daddy Time" on those days was with the Baby of the Day, or babies if Hermione or Padma was that day's witch. But even on Harry's days off, the kids had their own

schedule and that schedule included nap time, which was where all his kids were now. His wives were off somewhere as well. He would not be surprised if Hermione, Luna, Daphne and Padma were down in the library or if Katie and Rosie were taking a nap as well or if the others were spending time with their friends and families. Harry was standing on the Potter House balcony looking out over the lake. While it was early afternoon in the Wing, it was a little after seven in the morning in the Outside World.

He was not alone. As large as the Wing was, it was hard to be alone. Sirius and Marilyn now lived in the last of the Potter House Apartments. The Dogs Playing Poker from Sirius's guestroom now hung in his study. The two of them were nearby on the balcony enjoying the sun. Robert Granger was also nearby as his wife was busy watching several babies sleep, including their new children and grandchildren. Arthur Weasley was present as well. Ginny and his granddaughter were apparently taking a nap.

Arthur was now a frequent visitor in House Potter. The day after the guests all learned of what had occurred, he had spoken with Harry and Ginny about the Contract. He was not proud of it. He had never told Ginny about it because he hoped they would be able to avoid actually going through with it. He knew if they went forward with it, Ginny might - as she feared - be pulled from school probably without even attaining her OWLs, which would mean that she legally would be barred from owning or using a wand.

Arthur admitted that at the time they could have used the money that was offered. They did not need it really. Molly had recently received an inheritance that would allow them to send all of their children to Hogwarts rather than King's College which Molly opposed. But it was not really about the money.

Molly had some paperwork that indicated the Weasleys had been named as potential custodians and guardians of Harry Potter should his parents pass away before he attained his majority. She had contacted Dumbledore about this not long after learning that James and Lily were dead and that Harry was believed to be alive but in some kind of protective custody - which was what the paper had reported. She had demanded that Dumbledore, as Chief Warlock, allow her to review the boy's current custodial arrangements and to be allowed at the very least that Arthur should act as his Magical Guardian. Dumbledore insisted this was unnecessary as he was

quite comfortable with Harry's situation and felt it no burden to act in Harry's stead. Apparently, Molly went into one of her rants. While Dumbledore may be a headmaster, he has never been a parent and knew nothing about young children from experience and that young children are nothing like the children he dealt with at school. She had threatened to petition for guardianship based upon the paperwork she held.

Dumbledore argued that the worst thing that could possibly happen would be if House Potter and its fortune fell under the control or influence of the Pureblood Elites, which is what would happen if Molly pursued her claim. Apparently, he was aware as who might have similar paperwork and knew the Weasleys were not at the top of that list. Sirius Black was probably at the top and not far below him was Andromeda Tonks nee Black. Sirius might be in Azkaban, but Andromeda was not and while Orion Black had vowed to disown her, he died before he could become Head of the Ancient and Noble House of Black. Arcturus Black had never disowned her which meant she still owed a degree of fealty to her Head of House which would mean House Black - whose political persuasion was patently unacceptable - would control House Potter. Even if that would not come to pass, there were dark families with a closer degree of kinship to Harry than the Weasleys, most notably Narcissa Malfoy and they had wealth and social standing, two things that tended to impress the Wizengamot in these matters. It was for the best that Harry remain away from the magical world lest such events come to pass.

More critical, however, was the continuation of House Potter. Again, it was important that House Potter not fall under the dominion of the Pureblood Elites and, if they failed to achieve such control by becoming his guardians, they could do so through marriage. It was entirely probable Harry would be offered very lucrative marriage contracts from those families, ones it would be hard for a guardian to ignore. So long as he remained outside their world, such offers would not be made. But once he started school, unless he was already betrothed, it could happen. Moreover, Harry was not destined to live a long life. He would most likely finish school, but after that? Dumbledore doubted Harry would live to see twenty-one. Just as critical as keeping Harry out from under the control of the Pureblood Elites was the importance of continuing his line. It would be far better for their world if he were betrothed now and in an unassailable contract to a daughter from a Light family, a family that

would ensure the continuation of the Potter line sooner rather than later.

The explanation was not terribly convincing, but it was honest. Arthur admitted Dumbledore could be quite persuasive when he wanted to be and quite charming, both figuratively and literally from the magical perspective. The money ... to this day Arthur still considered it akin to blood money and was embarrassed he had agreed to it. He signed the contract and then forgot about it. It was in his mind a betrothal contract between infants, few of which were ever enforced. They were made to secure alliances and allow an excuse to refuse others, not necessarily to see the two children marry. In fact, until not long after the Second Task, Dumbledore had never even mentioned it again.

Dumbledore said he had hoped a relationship leading to marriage would develop mostly naturally between Harry and Ginny. But events were unfolding that told him this would not be the case, even if it could have been otherwise. Ginny's relationship with Neville since the Ball was one example. He was a fine young man and good catch and it was becoming increasingly clear the two were smitten. Harry's relationship with Hermione did not seem to be heading towards a romance, not that Dumbledore would have minded. She was, he said, a fine catch for their side. She was a fine young woman and her being a Muggle Born would mean she could not be a threat to their side.

But there was now a new wrinkle beyond Ginny and Neville. Harry had apparently rescued a young Veela girl in the Second Task from certain death. Harry would soon learn what this meant as the girl had clearly chosen him as a bondmate and Harry was too noble not to accept her when he found out. He had also recently learned of a Line Continuation Contract with House Abbott. Any marriage would trigger that contract, which meant a Plural Marriage and Harry would need a Half-Blood, a Muggle Born and a Pureblood to avoid any political marriages from the other side. Dumbledore was willing to push Hermione towards such a marriage with Harry and would allow the Veela to fulfill the Half Blood position. But he needed to control the Pureblood side of this equation and that was Ginny. Preferably, she would be the first and the others would follow.

Dumbledore was not about to tell Harry why he must do this. He felt that with the Tournament, it would be unwise to place any additional

burdens on the lad and, as he was still only fourteen, Dumbledore felt it improper to tell the lad he was not going to have a long life or that because he was expected to die, he had to have an heir sooner rather than later. Arthur and Molly were forced to promise not to tell Harry anything. They both argued that neither Harry nor Ginny were likely to agree to this. After all, Ginny was only thirteen and in order to marry, she would have to get pregnant. Dumbledore had always envisioned the possibility of potions and now that had become a necessity, although aside from seeing to it that Ginny no longer received her monthly dose of contraceptive potions, nothing could happen until after the Tournament. Harry would need to be thinking clearly until then.

Arthur was not aware that Molly had withdrawn five thousand Galleons from Harry's vault. Unfortunately, neither was he terribly surprised. Dumbledore had given them a list of potions and dosing instructions. While Molly was confident of her ability to make the Fertility Potion Ginny was to take each day after she got home for the summer, most of the others were beyond her abilities and were not exactly the kinds of potions one could buy at the Apothecary shop. In fact, aside from the fertility potion and a virility potion, the others were all both morally and legally questionable at best. You could not buy them. For the right price, you might be able to hire a Potions Master who could make them for you, and that right price could be pretty steep. Dumbledore had offered the services of Professor Snape but Molly was not about to put her daughter's life much less Harry's under that man's control. Molly did not trust him at all and nothing Dumbledore could say would change her mind.

"We didn't know what you know," Arthur said. "Dumbledore never told us about the Prophecy or anything else for that matter. He gave us just enough information and persuasion to get us to do what he wanted us to do. He has a formidable reputation in our world. What were we to do? We had no way of knowing that just about every decision he has made in regards to you had been the wrong one or certainly not the best one. Had I known then what I know now, I would have never agreed to that contract. I'm sorry, Harry. I will see to it you're paid back! Every knut!"

Harry had not wanted to hate the Weasleys, not even Ron. He had not wanted to believe they had been using him this whole time. For him, they had become the closest thing he had to a family up to now at least that he could remember. He did not want to think that Molly

was stealing from him or she and Arthur had been plotting against him from the start. It seemed clear to him now they were almost as much victims of Dumbledore's scheming as he was. They had been tricked into this it seemed for whatever Dumbledore thought was for the best. If anything, Arthur's explanation made Dumbledore appear even less trustworthy.

"All I want is for her to explain this as you have and an apology," Harry said.

"But the money..." Arthur began.

"I am aware of my finances and to be honest that amount is almost nothing really. I will want to know if she spent any of it, how much and on what. I'll refund her whatever she's spent."

"Harry, we can't accept that! We don't need the money!"

"Oh, but you do!" Harry said. "Do you honestly think Ginny and her new family can fit in her room if they come to visit? Do you see me and mine sharing a room with Ron? I have no doubt Mrs. Weasley could feed an army if she wanted to, but you certainly can't house one. Personally, I wouldn't change a thing in the Burrow itself. It has a unique charm for me and is full of pleasant memories. But you need a Guest House..."

"Hotel, more like," Arthur laughed. "You're right. While I don't doubt Molly would be more than willing to visit, I know she will insist on your visiting the Burrow and Ginny and her family as well - at least once she gets used to this."

Arthur Weasley was again Harry's "unofficial" Dad. He was also now Neville's, after all of all the Dad's he was the only one with almost as many children. Harry had others as well. Sirius was one, although he was more the mentor and older friend given that he was only recently married and still was awaiting the birth of his first child. Most of his other Father-in-Laws were as well. Xeno Lovegood was a bit too odd and Mr. Patil was a bit too distant. But of the others, Harry felt he got on the best with Robert Granger. Robert had spent probably more time with Harry than any of the others aside from Arthur and Sirius.

So he found himself on the balcony pondering everything. His biggest worry was being a father.

"I feel like I'm a lousy Dad," Harry said.

"Why do you say that?" Arthur asked.

Harry shrugged. "Never really had one at least not one I can remember. But really, I feel like ... I don't think I spend enough time with any of them."

Arthur, Sirius and Robert all laughed at him.

"What's so funny?" Harry asked.

"I can't advise you on being a Dad," Sirius said. "You beat me to that by a fair few months. I can say you a far better father for your children than mine was. I barely ever saw him and until I was nine I was not even allowed to speak to him except by saying 'Yes Sir,' 'No Sir,' and 'Thank You Sir.' I doubt he ever changed a nappie or gave us a bath. That's what servants were for."

"Sounds awful," Harry said.

"Actually, he was far better than my Mother. I'd rather have him ignore me than put up with her interminable lectures about being a proper Pureblood or later her rant about Lord Black - my grandfather. He forbade my father permission to become a Death Eater under pain of being disowned, a prohibition that extended to my brother and I. My brother was his mother's child. Joined up as soon as he could and was promptly disowned by my grandfather. To be honest, I felt an outsider in that house. Finally had enough of it and ran away."

"You did?"

Sirius nodded. "I was sixteen. After taking my OWLs I didn't go back to them again. I went to live with your father and his parents. If all I had known of parents and families were my own experiences with my parents, I would probably never considered getting married. But your parents - you do know your Gran was a Black?"

Harry nodded.

"She was more like Andy than the rest of that lot," Sirius said. "It was from them that I saw what a real family could be like and that not all Purebloods were like my parents."

"Still..." Harry began.

"Harry," Robert Granger said, "the fact you're concerned about this shows you're a good father. A good father never feels that he spends enough time with his children, even if we try. Then one day, they're grown up and moved away and have a family of their own. It all happens faster than you want it too. In my case, a lot faster."

"Sorry."

"Don't be," Robert said. "A year ago - it's been almost a year hasn't it - a year ago when Hermione told us what you did, Rose and I had all kinds of objections. Then again, we had concerns when we learned Hermione was a witch. It was clear then there was a parallel world out there and our daughter belonged in that one. The laws that allowed you to marry as you did and the Plural Marriage are a part of that world and we must accept them even if we don't agree. And it's not as if we could not see this coming one day. You just had to read Hermione's letters home and hear her speak to know you two could well end up together. That's not to say this was inevitable. Young people are incredibly fickle in that regard. Under other circumstances, you two may well have wound up with someone else and been quite happy about it."

"Our real objection, the only one that lingered for more than a couple of days, was your ages. You were and are teenagers. Despite your means, we were concerned you both were not mature enough to be parents. Then again, who really is? Rose and I were in Dental School when Hermione was born. We had planned on a family, just not then. Hermione, apparently, had other ideas. Rose was about seven or eight years older than Hermione when she was pregnant and I'm four years older than that. We love our daughter dearly, but life has its ways. We had school and could not take her with us. Fortunately, Rose's Mum and Dad lived nearby and we could leave Hermione with them. After Dental School, we started our practice and the hours were even worse at first and we were in a new place and could not leave our little girl with her Gran. When we finally had



the time to spend with our little girl, she was in school. And then she was gone - off to Hogwarts."

Robert seemed chocked up.

"Harry?" Arthur Weasley said. "As a parent, I've watched all of you and I agree with Robert that as a Dad it never seems like I can or have spent enough time with any of my children. I watch Ginny and Neville for obvious reasons and Neville with his other wives and children. But I watch you as well. As you know you might well have been a Weasley and are in many respects. You are a good father."

"I am?"

"It is not the amount of time you spend with them," Arthur said, "it is the quality of that time that matters. Then again, they are easy now."

"Easy?"

"They can't walk or crawl," Arthur said. "Just you wait. Once they can move about without help, they'll be hellions!"

"You were," Sirius added. "I gave you a toy broom for your first birthday and you sat it like a champ! You then proceeded to terrorize the cat with it and you couldn't even walk yet! Lily was so mad it almost was not funny! I think she was madder at your Dad who thought it was so brilliant!"

"Hermione was about two," Robert said. "She could walk by then and we heard this crash and scream of terror from the kitchen. We found her on top of the refrigerator with chocolate all over her face and a fudge in her hand. We kept the sweets up high so she couldn't get to them. Apparently, she built herself a ladder of sorts from chairs and boxes and such to get to the fudge and knocked it over when she tried to come down. I wish we had a photo."

Arthur laughed. "Don't even get me started about my lot! You know Harry? The hardest part about being a parent is that one day you have to punish your children for something and yet, more often than not, what you're really thinking is what they did was hilarious or at least bloody brilliant! Ginny might have been the worst overall."

"Ginny? I would think Fred and George..."

"Neither of them nicked a wand at age five and could use it. Ginny could! And, before Luna's Mum died, she and Luna were perhaps worse than the twins."

"Luna?"

"The two of them used to cause so much trouble... Although, to be totally honest Ginny was the primary instigator."

Harry chuckled. "Okay, that makes more sense."

"You're a good father, Harry," Sirius said. "When you come into the room, they all know who you are and want time with you and you do make the time."

"Even a hug and a few minutes counts," Arthur added. "They already seem to know they have to wait their turn for that, but that they will get it. While I also believe you're a good husband, you do realize what today is."

"A year in days since Gringotts when our marriages were official," Harry said. "There'll be a dance tonight in honor of it. But our joint Anniversary shall fall on April 1st. That was the real day we had our weddings."

"And your personal ones?" Robert asked. "You all did not marry on the same day in our time after all."

"Our bedding schedule aside," Harry began. This was no longer a total secret. "Day 373 here, I plan a nice, romantic, candle light dinner with dancing for Hermione. That's a year since our wedding date. I'll figure a way to take her out for her special night each January 15th to follow as that will mark our second year together in days. The others will follow in order of that wedding anniversary and so on."

"Gifts?" Robert asked.

"Not much I can do now, is there? But I intend to give each of them another permanent rose for their vase. They each have one right now. One day, I hope, they'll each have a forest of them."

"And a good husband too," Sirius said. "You do know you and Neville are setting a high standard for the rest of us."

"You're not doing too bad yourself in that regard," Arthur said.

"Just saying."

"This is hard for us," Harry admitted. "I want them all to be happy and I do work at it. I wish ... I wish I could be Hermione's, or Hannah's or Katie's or all of their exclusive, but that's not what happened. I want them all to be happy with this. Years from now, I want them all to look back and believe they made the right decision to be a part of this. They are all very special, every single one of them and I want them to know that all the time - at least from me."

"Something tells me you will succeed," Robert said. "Sirius is right though. You are making it harder for the rest of us and we only have one wife to deal with!"

Harry chuckled. "That might explain Moony."

Remus Lupin was being aggressively pursued by "I guess you can call me Dora and I won't hex you" Tonks. There was not a lot of gossip in the Wing, but this potential relationship had been it for ages. Dora had been chasing Remus since practically the first wedding. Yet, while they were generally considered a couple, as far as anyone knew they were not going anywhere ... at least until recently. There had been a huge blow up between them just a few days ago during dinner in the Main Dining Room.

"What do you mean by it not being that simple?" Dora said loud enough for the entire dining room to hear. "I love you! You love me! We are consenting adults! How much simpler can it be?"

"Dora?" Remus began.

"It was that simple for Sirius and Marilyn," Dora continued.

"What was that simple?" Sirius asked.

"Asking her to marry you," Dora said. "It was that simple for all the others!"

"Um...", Harry said, "I request you leave me out of that one. Hermione asked me, not the other way around, and she asked on behalf of all of them ... once she was certain I wasn't going to run away."

"Dora, I'm almost old enough to be your father!"

"My father is seven years older than you, Remus! That's not 'almost!' You were thirteen when I was born, not twenty!"

"And Harry's only fourteen," Remus began.

"Leave me out of this, Moony!" Harry said. "Rather unique circumstances. And chronologically if not legally, I'm sixteen! I'll be seventeen in July. And, I don't see your ages as a problem. Then again, it's not as if I have any intention of marrying again, much less to a three year old."

"Not helping, Cousin," Dora said.

Harry shrugged. "Told you two to leave me out of this."

Dora turned back to Remus. "I don't care about the age thing!"

"I'm a werewolf, Dora!"

"So once a month between moonrise and sunrise you have a little furry problem..."

"It's more than a little problem!"

"A problem you have not had since coming here. It's been a year now, right?"

"It's not a little problem!"

"And yet, while you've been spared your rougher day a month, I happen to be a woman and this Time Compression does not affect my cycle at all! My monthly visitor shows up right on schedule, no thanks to you!"

"It's not a little problem," Remus protested again.

"Oh? How many people have you bitten? You've had your problem since you were six! How many werewolves have you created?"

"None."

"Exactly! In fact seventy percent of all of the werewolves living in Britain were turned by a single rogue: Fenir Greyback, and that includes you. He is responsible for most of the new weres of the last twenty-five years and a significant number on the Continent as well! Saying you can't or won't marry me because you're a werewolf is like saying you can't marry because you're a wizard and some wizards are known to be Dark!"

"But children... Our children would be..."

"Old wives tale," Healer Tonks said. "Perpetuated, no doubt by the bigots. If you were a witch Were, you would be unable to have children. The Lycanthropic change tends to terminate pregnancies, assuming there was one. But as a male ... there is no documented case of a child of a werewolf becoming a werewolf unless that child were bitten as well."

"And I know you're responsible, Remus," Dora said. "That would never happen! Any other brilliant reasons why you won't ask me?"

"For the record," Andy Tonks said, "Ted and my only objection would have been your former employment status. Seeing as the Founders' Heirs have decided to retain you in some instructional capacity here at Hogwarts for the foreseeable future, that objection is moot. If you want our blessing, you have it."

"Aside from Moony," Sirius said, "is there anyone here who has any objection to these two idiots getting hitched?"

"Um, I might," Fred said.

"Oh?"

"It's Day 358. I picked Day 371 in the pool."

"Pool?" Moony asked.

"Yeah. We have a pool going as to when you will agree to letting the lovely Miss Tonks make an honest fur ball out of you."

"I picked Day 360," Bill said. "Go ahead with it!"

"Any other objections?" Sirius asked. "There being none, the motion carries! Get on with it, Moony!"

"What now?"

"Afraid I might say no?" Dora teased.

"Um... will you m-marry me?"

"Not exactly the most romantic proposal on record," Dora said with a chuckle. "But it will do."

"Well?"

"Well what?"

"Will you?"

"Of course I will, silly! But on two conditions..."

"Oh?"

"We have the wedding here and we have it before the end of Time Compression. I want two anniversaries per year just like all the others who were married here."

## TIME COMPRESSION DAY 396

There had been three more births since Day 363. Cynthia Turpin gave birth to a daughter they named Cathy on Day 368. Cathy, although born on April 2nd, 1995, would celebrate her assimilated birthday on January 10th, 1996. Andrea's mother gave birth to twin girls Emily and Jessica on Day 380. Finally, Laura's mother gave birth to a son named Thomas on day 389, just hours after the wedding of Remus and Dora.

A meeting had been called in House Potter. The meeting was for all of House Potter and Longbottom and certain adults. Those adults

were ones who possessed sufficient occlumency skills. That proved to be a very short list. Professor McGonagall was the only Hogwarts Professor present. Also present were Sirius Black and Remus and Dora Lupin. Bill Weasley was there as was his wife Fleur and Mrs. Delacour. Veela were taught the skill early in life as it helped them control their unique magic. There were no others.

"We think we've figured out how Voldemort has done it," Hermione said. "Ginny found it."

"That's not exactly right," Ginny said. "I merely recognized it for what it was."

"Be that as it may," Hermione said. "Over the last few months, we finally had time to look through the books on Necromancy we got from the Black Estate and there it was. Ginny?"

"What we were looking for was a way, however dark, that a wizard's body could die, his spirit remain and yet where he was not a ghost."

"How do you know he's not a ghost?" Bill asked.

"Ghosts can't take possession of people," Ginny replied. "Voldemort's done that at least once. That's what happened to me First Year. There was also what happened to Professor Quirrell, although that was somewhat short of out right possession. Whatever this dark magic was, it also had to allow for the possibility of the spirit to regain a physical form."

"You're talking about a Horcrux, aren't you?" Bill said.

Ginny nodded.

"There references to them in some old Curse Breaking manuals," Bill said. "Very dark and very dangerous stuff. They don't really say what they are, though."

"A horcurx is a very dark magical object as you say, Bill," Ginny continued. "It's wickedly difficult to make one - takes a full month of rituals and enchantments and it cannot be completed without a human sacrifice of sorts."

"Of sorts?" McGonagall asked.

"One of the last steps is to commit cold blooded murder."

"So aside from an excuse to kill people, what is it?" Dora asked.

"Properly prepared," Ginny said, "it is a vessel or container of sorts, into which the Dark Wizard is able to trap a piece of his own soul. So long as the Horcrux remains intact, his entire soul is trapped in this plane of existence. It cannot move on even if his physical body is destroyed. And, under the right circumstances, he will be capable of restoring himself to a physical form although it's not easy.

"The primary spirit - that part of his soul that was in his body when it died - is capable of taking possession of animals and even people for a time. That usually destroys the victim in the end. It is possible to take over completely, but not for long.

"The soul fragment - that part within a horcrux - is also capable of taking possession of a person. Again, such possession is not for long and will destroy that person as well. But, what that possession does do is allow the soul access to the means with which to fully restore it to a body."

"That being said," Hermione continued, "what happened our first two years doesn't make a lot of sense. Then again, maybe we don't have all the books on this."

"Oh?" Harry asked.

"First Year Voldemort went after the Philosopher's Stone wanting to make the Elixir of Life. The problem is, aside from Nicholas Flamel and maybe his wife, who really knows anything about either of those? It's not like they ever published their work. I guess it's possible, but it seems a bit desperate. As for what happened to Ginny in the end, had she died, he would have been no better off. Without a real body, the best he could manage would be a slightly magical ghost."

"But he can come back?" Neville asked.

"There is a way and I'm surprised he didn't try it the first time," Hermione said. "There is a really nasty ritual. First, you need a baby and preferably a magical one. The baby must be sacrificed within its



first day of life. The body will die, of course, but the primary spirit can take it over and with assistance and dark magic, can keep the body from decaying for a long period of time. That body would also be able to communicate. Eventually, a vile potion is prepared in a large cauldron. The body is placed into the potion as it begins to boil. Three more elements are required to complete the ritual. The first is a bone from an ancestor of the same gender. The second two are blood sacrifices. A servant must willingly sacrifice part of their body - cut it off - and dump it in the potion. Finally, an enemy's blood must be used as well. If done properly, it creates a human like, physical manifestation of the Dark Wizard's soul."

"Human like?" Sirius asked.

"Well, it's not really human, is it? It would look human like, but it's really a dark magical creation, not truly alive. But it would be mortal and can be destroyed just as easily as any real human."

"But if he still has one of those things, he can just come back again in time," Neville added.

"That's correct," Hermione said.

"So he made one of these horcrux things?" Harry asked.

"More than one actually," Hermione replied. "The diary was one and you destroyed it, yet he's still trying to come back."

"How many more?"

Hermione shrugged. "Who knows? No one seems to have made more than one. There may be a practical limit. My guess was he was aiming for a magically significant number. My guess would be seven as it is extremely powerful magically. The next two numbers would be thirteen and thirty-three which both seem unlikely. And we must wonder whether he was aiming at seven soul pieces or seven soul fragments."

"There's a difference?" Harry asked.

"If it was soul pieces, his primary spirit counts. That means six horcruxes. If it was soul fragments, his primary spirit does not count

and that would mean seven - assuming he made them all. We don't know."

"So there's at least one more out there and probably several more."

"A fair assumption," Hermione replied. "That and they could be literally anywhere."

"What might they be?" Neville asked.

"Could be anything, really. Well, almost anything. The ideal material is gold. It does not decay or rust and permanence is a goal."

"Which is why we Curse Breakers are aware of them," Bill added.

"Why the diary then? It wasn't gold."

Hermione shrugged. "Perhaps it had some other significance or perhaps he couldn't find any gold."

"A Galleon then?"

"Possible, but unlikely. You might actually spend it and most Dark Wizards used something rather unique - something easy to recognize," Bill said. "Then they usually hide it away protected by powerful curses and enchantments. They're wicked hard to get to and harder to destroy."

"What destroys them?"

"Three things," Hermione said. "Basilisk venom is one, as you should know from the Chamber. Fiendfyre is another, although its very dangerous and dodgy magic. The Venom destroys magic and the Fiendfyre consumes it. Either way, the protective vessel is destroyed along with the soul fragment. The third thing is of no use."

"Why not?"

"The maker can destroy his own horcrux with the Killing Curse. But no one else can do the same."

"Oh. But we do have access to a Basilisk and we can learn Fiendfyre. Not that it matters all that much. We know he as at least

one more of those things out there somewhere and maybe several of them. But we don't know what they are or where they are and so long as even one of them remains intact, we can kill the bastard but he can still come back again, right?"

"That's about the size of it," Hermione said.

"It's hopeless then," Harry moped.

"No Harry, it's just not going to be easy," Hermione said.

"Then again," Daphne said, "it's a fair bet Dumbledore knows of them. He might not know much more than we do, then again he might. He's probably suspected them for years and may have already started dealing with them. At the very least, he may have some useful information about them and what they might be."

"Useful information he's not likely to tell us."

"You never know, Harry," Hermione said.

"Hermione's right," Sirius said. "When Dumbledore is holding all the cards, he is tight with it. But, if he knows what we know and that we'll go after those things regardless, he might be more forthcoming."

"Assuming, of course, another of our assumptions is correct," Hermione said.

"Another?" Harry asked.

"We believe Dumbledore's belief that you have to die did not exist until after your family was attacked. If he was so certain, why would he place you and Neville under a Fidelius? Why not just let things play out? No! We think he believes that somehow you became a Horcrux that night."

"So I do have to die?"

"No Harry!" Ginny said. "If Dumbledore believed that, he's dead wrong! More wrong than about anything else we've seen! If he knew about how to make one of those things, he could never have believed that. But most of the books that discuss them never tell you

how they are made, only what they are, how to identify them and how to destroy them. Remember, the ritual to create the vessel takes a full moon cycle: full moon to new moon and back again. He didn't take you off for a month, did he?"

"Time Compression," Harry began.

"Affects internal clocks," Hermione replied. "Not external ones. That's why we were able to get pregnant, have our children and once again have to suffer through our monthly visitor! That cycle might be triggered by the tides, but it is internal from then on and not tied in to the moon cycle at all. Moony, on the other hand, his condition is which is why he hasn't suffered a single transformation in over a year!"

"Then there's the fact you've never been possessed by the thing," Ginny said. "I had that bloody diary less than a year and it began taking me over within months and almost killed me! Something like that would have done the same to you!"

"I have this connection," Harry began pointing to his scar.

"You've never been possessed!" Ginny said. "Harry, I have absolutely no memory of ever doing anything that happened that year regarding the attacks! None! I only suspected I was involved and was not certain until after I woke up in that Chamber after you destroyed the horcrux."

"Finally," Daphne said, "there's something we haven't discussed because until now it was unnecessary. The object used for a horcrux must be magically inert before the ritual can begin. Any residual magic would prevent the soul piece from binding with the object. Only the horcrux magic alone will allow that to occur. And if you were magically inert..."

"I'd be a squib," Harry began.

"Actually, you'd be dead, Harry," Hermione said. "Magically inert means magically inert. All living things have some magic. You remove the magic and it dies. That's what the Killing Curse does."

"So I can't be one, can I?"

"No Harry, you can't. It's impossible. Although, unless you know how those things are made, you could reach that conclusion. This supports one of our possible conclusions about Dumbledore. He made assumptions and didn't do the research!"

"Fifty or sixty years of being the greatest Wizard might make one complacent in that regard," Sirius added.

"There's one other thing to consider, Harry," Healer Tonks said. "Basilisk venom. You were bitten by one, yes?"

"But Dumbledore's phoenix Fawkes cured me," Harry said.

"Their magic doesn't cure, Harry, it heals and there is a difference. His magic cannot neutralize poisons, it just makes you magically immune to it - although I would not recommend playing with basilisks in the future. Your brilliant young friends say that poison would destroy one of those things. I can tell you that poison is still in your system at what for anyone else would be a lethal level."

"It is?"

"Remember when I drew blood from the lot of you when we learned Rose Granger was expecting?"

Everyone nodded.

"Muggles don't respond to Blood Replenishing Potion. Had something gone wrong - and fortunately nothing did - I would have to do it the Muggle way with a transfusion. I was looking for blood matches and Harry's would have been, but I couldn't use it. The venom still coursing through his veins would have killed her. So it would seem your now immune to that venom, but it would have destroyed the thing if you were one."

"So I can't be a horcrux," Harry said. "It's impossible and yet Dumbledore is certain I am?"

"I think that sums it up pretty well," Hermione said.

"Bugger! And my scar and connection?"

"It's been known to happen," Healer Tonks said. "It runs in some families, the connection that is. It is also possible given the violence of that night it might be a minor form of possession, nothing an exorcism can't fix. As for the scar? Most often scars are just that."

## THE SOUTH WING - TIME COMPRESSION DAY 450.

The rest of Time Compression was mostly uneventful. There were no more marriages, although it was clear that Cedric and Cho would have wished it otherwise if only she were either seventeen or allowed to skive off her contraceptive potions. There were two more births. Lucinda's mother gave birth to her new little brother Michael on Day 400. The last birth when announced was expected to shock the wizarding world and knock Draco Malfoy down several pegs. Marilyn and Sirius had a son on Day 412 that they named James Remus Black, thus cutting off the Malfoy from any hope of being Head of an Ancient and Noble House. Hannah was elated although she felt she would be more like an Aunt than a Half-Sister.

Dinner for all the adults as such was held in the Main Dining Room, although several of the babies were present. Some of the oldest were now teething and had been weaned and were drinking regular milk and juice and eating puréed foods - and generally making a mess of it. Then again, Hermione spoke for many but not all the Mums: there were certain parts of the female anatomy that were not meant to be chew toys.

"I don't know," Remus had said when he heard. "Dora seems to be into that sort of thing."

"Too much information from the Newlywed," Neville had called out in response.

For Harry, the biggest - no - only disappointment was that no one had achieved an animagus form yet. Okay, fine! It was both bloody hard and totally unpredictable, but still. According to Sirius and Professor McGonagall, they were all making excellent progress. McGonagall had taken two years to finally do it and Sirius a year and a half, just a few weeks after Harry's Dad but still... Harry knew the theory. You could not choose your form. Even more than a wand, it chose you. He was disappointed to learn his Dad's form was actually not desirable. A stag was something Muggles hunted. You wanted one of two forms. A stealth form was good and even preferred. Dogs and cats worked, although there were better ones and birds better still since they could get away more easily. Any form people would ignore were good. In a bad situation, it could allow you to escape and in others to observe and not be observed. A combat form was second best. These were almost always top end predators

designed to hunt and kill. A tiger, for example, could kill even the most powerful wizard if it got close enough undetected and true tigers were fairly good at stalking prey. Then again, a tiger at large in Britain might prove a problem. Large, prey animals - like a stag, were not worth much. There was barely any point in registering them as they could not sneak about and were likely to get shot by a hunter in the wrong places and wrong time of year. Still, Harry wished he had perfected a form. It would happen if it happened was what he had been told. That did not help one bit. But Time Compression was almost over. They would continue their work and training towards possible animagus transformation, but it would be in Real Time.

"May I have your attention please?" Professor McGonagall's voices sounded over the diners as she rose from her seat. "Yesterday, four hundred and fifty days ago, we gathered in this room for what I thought would be a lunch. I had planned to stick around for dinner and that was it. I guess, like many outside of Neville, Harry and their wives, I too was lured here under false pretenses." There were several chuckles.

"That was four hundred and fifty lunches ago. We are currently finished our four hundred and fiftieth dinner and will have our four hundred and fiftieth breakfast in the morning. I am told that by the end of breakfast tomorrow, our staff here will have served a total of 110,342 meals either here in the Main Dining Room, or in our own rooms, or in the House Potter or House Longbottom apartments, and that does not include the breakfasts and dinners Mr. Potter is known to have cooked for his wives and guests. Nor, I am told, does it include the 37,553 snacks served to date or the tens of thousands of crumpets consumed during our numerous afternoon teas nor the hors' d'oeuvres served at various functions, much less the birthday and other cakes. Our daily menu including snacks contained 1,897 total menu items. There were five that were never ordered and eighty-seven that had to be stricken as we ran out of some ingredients.

"We have all been to twenty-three lovely weddings. Were Miss Chang born about six months earlier it may well have been twenty-four." Cho blushed, but it was well known within the Wing that she and Cedric were heading that way. "Thirty-six children have been born here during that time as well. We have celebrated ninety-four birthdays and thirty-five wedding anniversaries, not to mention our own assimilated Christmas and Halloween.



"Let's see," she continued consulting a book, "we had twelve darts tournaments, ten in pocket billiards, twenty-five swimming races, twenty chess tournaments, seven in Muggle Tennis and ten in Muggle Basketball tournaments in our Gym and goodness knows how many competition duels! And let us not forget the various clubs that formed and contributed to our lives here - for better or worse." Again there were chuckles as the "Prank Club" containing the former Marauders, the Weasley Twins and Jason Lee and Daniel Urquhart was known as a testing ground for future Weasley Products. Their grand prank was their test of the Portable Swamp, which they placed in the Main Dining Room. There were also an Art Club, given the prints throughout the Wing, a Music Club that had given several recitals, a Book Club, a Quidditch Club - not that they could play but the entertainment system had a number of matches to watch and critique, a Football Club with similar restrictions, and a few movie and television clubs. Dr. Who, Star Trek and Monty Python being the larger and in the latter case more annoying.

"But it has not been all fun and games. The young people - and a fair few adults - found they were here to learn and the rest of us to teach. Our eight Upper years all achieved high marks on their NEWTs and six have also added between two and four very respectable OWLs to their list. Our middle years ... what can I say? To use a Muggle Expression, as a group they blew the doors off their OWLs - mostly Outstandings and we can claim French, British or International Honors in every subject! Our Lower Years have all passed with high marks through the end of Third Year in the core courses and through the end of Fourth Year in Arithmancy and Ancient Runes.

"Perhaps we didn't push them hard enough. The Muggle parents - most of them any way - sat for the same written exams and did quite well. Moreover, six of them sat for OWLs in Arithmancy, Ancient Runes, Herbology and Potions as they require no wands and all managed an Exceeds Expectations or better! The Grangers and Caldwelles all managed three Outstandings, and With Distinctions in Potions and Herbology! Then again, they are Muggle Health Care Professionals. The Grangers are similar to Healers, although they specialize in teeth and such and the Caldwelles are both Pharmacists, which are Muggle Apothecaries. Even a couple of centuries ago there was little distinction between a magical and Muggle in that art."

"All of this information and much more is in this book," McGonagall said holding up the large book she had been consulting. "I would like to thank Mr. Lovegood and his daughter Luna for putting it together and I know they had a lot of help. They call it a photographic history of this wing, although it does have plenty of words too. Of particular note, there's an opening section regarding the renovations to this Wing including before and after and during photos. It's quite illuminating. Each of you will find your own copy in your rooms.

"That being said," McGonagall continued, "it would seem our time here is almost up. At ten o'clock tomorrow morning, we return to real time. We return to Sunday, April 2nd, 1995 and somewhat unfortunately to the lives we left behind when we came here. We came here as disparate groups and individuals and in many cases unknown to each other. I'd like to think we have become a community of friends and family. There is no doubt that was the hope of our hosts, House Potter and House Longbottom."

There was a long applause.

"That being said," McGonagall continued, "a true return to the ways things were before all of this is both imprudent and impractical. Even if four of our students were not the Founders' Heirs and thus in control of the Castle, our normal student dormitories are not equipped to deal with the needs of young families and what married student quarters we do have are not suitable for the unique family situations. In the past, the policy was to send the infants away upon their birth. But as they have all bonded with their parents - and certainly with their mothers - that option is not available to us either. To be honest, even in a House as well meaning as Hufflepuff, the Common Room in most cases is unsuitable for such young children.

"As Professor Dumbledore is away and unavailable and will remain so until Monday morning, under our existing Charter, I am Acting Headmistress and have full authority to address issues that need to be addressed and cannot wait until he returns. I find the Housing Issue falls square within that authority. House Potter and House Longbottom will continue to reside here in the House Wing beginning tomorrow. We know that the Founders' Heirs could have mandated this, and while this decision was based upon their recommendation, by using existing, recognized authority, we can avoid any unnecessary delay or confrontations.

"Although it has been over two centuries since the last time Hogwarts had an underage married couple - or at least a couple under the age of sixteen legally speaking, the rules for them are no different than the rules for our other married couples. You are considered as adults, yet students as well. You are exempt from curfew to the same extent as Prefects. That means you are allowed out of your dormitories until one in the morning rather than until nine in the evening like all others. However, like Prefects, you may not leave the Castle after normal curfew, at least during the academic week which runs from Sunday Dinner until your last school obligation of the week or end of classes on Friday, whichever is later. Although as there is no Quidditch this year, that means Friday afternoon. During the Academic Week, you will be expected to take Lunch and Dinners in the Great Hall with the rest of the school unless excused by a teacher or Madam Pomfrey. You are free to take your breakfasts here if you so choose."

"What about our children?" Lucinda asked.

"It had been the custom to allow them to dine in the Great Hall once they were weaned from their mother's breast. The parents were also free to make separate arrangements as to their children's feedings."

"I'm certain I don't want my little Lawrence anywhere near the rest of Slytherin."

"Given your unique circumstances, I also agree that requiring you to dine at your old House Tables, whether or not your children are with you, would be impractical. As such, unofficially the residents of the South Wing will be considered their own House. You will have your own table in the Great Hall as far from the animals of Slytherin House as can be and, naturally, you will live here and not in your former Houses. For the purposes of your remaining class schedules, House Points and the like, however, you remain as you were before."

"Thank you, Professor," Lucinda said and the other three Slytherin wives nodded in agreement.

"As I said, the South Wing will be considered a separate House in many, but not all ways," McGonagall continued. "As such, it will not be limited to House Potter and House Longbottom. As you already

know, Lord Black will continue to reside here for the foreseeable future along with his wife Marilyn and their son James. Lady Black has decided to take an indefinite leave of absence from the Department of Magical Law Enforcement to care for her child and, according to her, have at least a couple more before it's too late. She has also agreed to supervise the South Wing Day Care service which shall attend to the needs of all the young children as I cannot authorize them to attend classes in the Castle with the rest of the school for what I think are obvious reasons. This service will be available to any parent of a child who was born here whether or not you live here and you all will find materials in your rooms regarding the arrangements available to drop off and pick up your children should you decide to take advantage of this service. You need not worry about the staffing. As you are all aware, there are more than enough elves here who are willing to assist.

"Professor Lupin and his wife Dora will also reside here for the foreseeable future. Dora will commute to her job as an Auror via floo. As our students know, Professor Moody will not teach beyond this year, so the Heirs have invited Professor Lupin to resume his post next year. The primary objections to his previous tenure came from our Board of Governors, a body rendered moot the moment the Heirs claimed their rights. They will all be discharged effective immediately and notified in tomorrow's outgoing post.

"The Heirs have already appointed a replacement Advisory Board to handle various issues to include financing and policy implementation and such. They are: Madam Augusta Longbottom, Mr. Arthur Weasley, Mr. David Greengrass, myself, Healer Albert Turpin, Mr. Sonjay Patil, Lady Marilyn Black, Madam Amelia Bones, Healer Ted Tonks, Mrs. Rose Granger, Dr. Allison Caldwell and Dr. John Bell. You will note six women and six men. The former board had but one woman. You will also note an equal number of Purebloods, Half Bloods, Muggle Borns and Muggle parents. The former board was all Purebloods. The Heirs hope the diversity will prove beneficial to the school and intend that it be maintained. Moreover, Lady Appoline Delacour and Signore Mario Marcella have been appointed as Liaisons to help facilitate future international exchanges to include perhaps the formation of a Quidditch League between at least Hogwarts, Beauxbatons and the Italian Institute in Rome."

There was an applause. Everyone in the Wing was aware of the "Quidditch Plan." The hope was to begin with certain schools

throughout Western Europe as somewhat of an exhibition, although there would be the title of European Champion on the line. If it proved popular enough, several National Leagues would be set up. Each school within that League would raise a team to compete each year for their National or League Championship. Britain, for example, would have five teams, one from each of their schools. The National Champion school would field the National Team the next year to play for the European Championship. But this was probably years in the future. Harry hoped he might play for Hogwarts in the first year or two of the "fixed" as in pre-national league competition teams, but doubted he'd still be eligible when the full thing was up and running. Still, to even be the part of something like that was exciting and as he had no plans to go professional - he had heard what that was like from Victor and did not love Quidditch that much - it would be his contribution to the sport and all that he hoped might one day flow from it in the way of exchanges.

"Continuing," McGonagall said. "Mr. William Weasley and his wife, Miss Delacour," again as there was more than one Mrs. Weasley in the room, maiden names were used, "shall also continue to reside here in the South Wing. Mr. Weasley shall commute to his job with Gringotts via floo and is going to try to set up a dedicated connection to the bank. This is mainly for the benefit of Lord Black. As we all know, so long as someone has not committed an offense against the Goblin Nation, Gringotts is neutral ground and no Ministry can make an arrest there. But the only public floo connection is at the Leaky Cauldron and Lord Black would have to walk from there to Gringotts to attend to his House financial affairs. While Madam Bones will try to see justice done, we are all painfully aware of the realities. For the foreseeable future, Diagon Alley is dangerous ground for Lord Black. Hopefully, a direct connection to Gringotts will be of benefit to him and his House.

"Miss Delacour, as you have passed out of all but one of your classes, with the exception of your course in Magical Government and Law with Madam Maxime, you are excused from attending class. Madam Maxime and I hope you shall use your time productively given the upcoming task. You will have full access to Hogwarts Library, the South Wing and your school carriage. You will be expected to sit for your one remaining class. Aside from that and subject to the adult student restrictions I've mentioned, your time is your own. Use it wisely."

"Merci, Madam McGonagall," Fleur said.

"Mr. Viktor Krum," McGonagall continued. "Both you and your wife Katya have passed out of all your NEWT classes. However, as you are aware, as one of the Tri-wizard Champions, you are obligated to remain here through the end of the Tournament. As friends of both House Longbottom and Potter, you are free to reside in the South Wing, subject of course to the adult student restrictions, and have full access to all this Wing and Hogwarts can provide for your further training."

"Katya and I tank you," Victor said, "and our friends."

"Moreover," McGonagall continued, "there are a fair few Quidditch players who shall remain in this Wing who, while maybe not up to International Standard, are fairly decent. I wish I could let you use our School Pitch, but it has been confiscated for the Final Task. That being said, give us a week or so and we'll have a practice pitch set up and you will have a fair few eager South Wing volunteers with time - and maybe others as well - to practice with. It would be a shame for your broom skills to atrophy because of this Tournament."

"Tank you," Victor said. "Katya is fair Keeper herself. Better zan our Bulgarian one, but she is Ukraine and was sixteen then and could not play for my team. We would love to play against decent Keeper and Seeker for once!" Everyone knew he meant Harry and Lucinda, the latter had been the only decent player for Slytherin the last two years and second best Keeper at Hogwarts after Gryffindor's Oliver Wood who now played as a Reserve for Puddlemere United. There was already talk about a match between Harry and Victor later in the year.

"Which brings us to our last Seventh Year and our Hogwarts students," McGonagall continued. "As you are well aware, Mr. Diggory, you have successfully passed all of your original NEWTs and added an additional NEWT in Potions."

"Yes Professor," Cedric said. "And I really appreciate that opportunity. I only managed and Exceeds on my Potions OWL and thought I had to give up my dream of becoming a Healer. But now ... and I really appreciated the Healing Course as well."

"Like the others, you will not be required to attend your former classes and will have full access to the resources of this Wing to prepare for the Final Task and, hopefully, towards your career choice. That being said, you and Miss Chang are not yet married so I cannot allow you to live here full time. Besides, Professor Sprout would be concerned about the morale in your House were you to abandon them completely at this time."

"I understand Professor," Cedric replied although clearly he was disappointed.

"That being said," McGonagall continued, "you shall retain your room here which you may use during regular hours and you may sleep in on Friday and Saturday nights and one other night per week. I offer you this privilege in part because I know you will use your free time well and would not want to see you violate curfew and in part because I would rather you and Miss Chang had another option for your amorous liaisons other than abusing broom closets. She will be afforded the same privileges."

Cedric and Cho blushed furiously as many others chuckled.

"That being said, because this Wing is the Founders' Heirs Wing, my authority, and that of Professor Dumbledore and the rest of the Hogwarts staff stops at the door unless they agree otherwise. I know all of you may have friends here who were not with us these past fifteen months and House Potter and Longbottom may well allow them admission to this Wing. BUT, while I have no authority over you married couples in this regard and have granted Mr. Diggory and Miss Chang a boon, should I learn this has become a student bawdy house, I can bar the others from ever entering here again - at least while they are students!"

"Like we'd want to see Lavender Brown and her Boy of the Week going at it," Ginny piped up.

"Or have our elves clean the sheets afterwards," Daphne added getting a laugh.

"I am glad we are in agreement then," McGonagall said after the laughs died down. McGonagall then sighed loudly. "Fred and George Weasley," she began. "You two have passed your NEWTs and passed through your year in four other courses. Much as I'd like

to make you attend classes, I can't. Having passed your NEWT classes, it would be improper to make you sit through Sixth Year. As for your other classes, to drop you in now ... might be disruptive to the other students. But I can't send you home either as that requires permission from both your parents even though you are of age and your father would rather you remain here for now given your mother will have enough to deal with soon. So you're stuck here. I do hope you will continue your education next year... I'd hate to lose the two best Beaters my House has seen in ages... You will reside here in the South Wing for the remainder of the year with your wives..."

Alicia and Angelina practically squealed with delight.

"... and I do hope you use your free time productively. Work on your budding business or businesses, as I'm sure you'll do well in the end. You have full access to this Wing's resources and, if they don't have it and can get it for you, Mr. Potter and Mr. Longbottom are willing to help. Help our Champions as they need it and ... Victor would well like to see you two play. Naturally, the same goes for your wives. They will reside here as well, although Miss Johnson is taking Care of Magical Creatures so she will have to attend that class for now. They too will reside here and are excused from their other former NEWT classes. We will discuss next year later."

"Thank you, Professor," the four said in unison.

"Now for our Middle Years," Professor McGonagall went on. "First off, you have all passed seven OWLs with wonderful marks and have completed at least half of the Sixth Year NEWT material as well. However, neither I nor the other Professors feel it would be fair to you to drop you into Sixth Year so late in the game, nor would it be fair to next year's Sixth Year's to have to compete against the lot of you for marks given as you are so far ahead. So, you will not be required to attend those classes for the remainder of this year, but we all hope you will continue those classes next year. We will plan a special section for you all separate from the other Sixth Year students that will take into account where you are with the material."

"Professor Snape is going to love that," Daphne said sarcastically.

"Do we have to take Potions, Professor?" Harry asked. "Don't get me wrong. Here in the South Wing it finally made sense to me and Neville and others, but..."



"I am well aware of your issues with Professor Snape, Mr. Potter. And yes, I am sure he will be overjoyed to learn there will be twenty-one of you in special session given that he has never had more than fifteen NEWT students in Sixth and Seventh Years combined. That being said, as Founders' Heirs you cannot remove staff due to our contracts. But you can hire staff..."

"Mrs. Tonks and I would be honored to continue as your Potions professors next year," Madam Longbottom said. Like Andy Tonks, Neville's Gran was also an accomplished Potions Mistress. "And, by sharing the load, Mrs. Tonks would be able to continue in her current position at St. Mungo's."

"That would be brilliant," Harry replied.

"Now that we have that settled," McGonagall continued, "As for Astronomy, History of Magic and any other electives you were taking, you will be required to attend those classes for the remainder of this year and, for our Fifth Years, sit for the OWLs. Likewise, I cannot allow any of you to drop Astronomy or History of Magic. For those of you in Third and Fourth Year, we will discuss the possibility of dropping one or more of your remaining electives beginning next year at a later time. Again, I urge you to use your new free time productively."

"Finally our Lower Years. In many ways, you were the hardest to consider. You all have passed through the end of Third Year in all of your courses and through the end of Fourth Year in Arithmancy and Ancient Runes. Naturally, to ask you to sit those courses with your original years or to make you join an upper year would be unfair to you at the very least. Consequently, you will not be required to attend those classes. Again, I cannot excuse you from Astronomy or History of Magic so you will attend those with your House. Next year, you will all have a special session in those courses here in the South Wing. I don't think it would be prudent to drop you lot into classes with students two or three years older than you. Again, I urge you to make use of this Wing and use your free time productively."

"Do we have to go back to our Houses?" Astoria Greengrass asked. "I mean, my sister gets to live here and..."

"I have given this a lot of thought. I understand it may be difficult for you and Mr. Urquhart to return to living in Slytherin especially as they will learn you openly consort with known Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs..."

"Not to mention Muggle Borns and Blood Traitors," Daniel Urquhart. "Then again, that's their loss, not ours."

"Well put," McGonagall nodded. "Now, unlike Mr. Diggory and Miss Chang, the eight of you do have older sisters who will be living here from now on. And, as I previously stated, you are all still Gryffindors, Hufflepuffs, Ravenclaws and Slytherins. That being said, I will not require Mr. Urquhart or Miss Greengrass to return to living in Slytherin House if they don't want to..."

"YES!" Daniel exclaimed.

"And if I give them that option, then I give the same to the rest of you. You may choose to return to your Houses as of tomorrow night. If you do so, while you will have access to this Wing, you will NOT be allowed a room here on your own and you will reside in your House dormitory with your year mates for the remainder of your time at Hogwarts. Your other option is to remain here. If you choose that, this is where you will reside for the remainder of your time here, but you will retain access to your former Houses and their Common Rooms, you will continue to attend classes with them, aside from your South Wing classes, and so forth."

"That's easy," Daniel said, "I'm staying!"

"Me too," Astoria added.

"Same here," added Jason Lee, Daniel's Hufflepuff roommate. It was soon unanimous.

McGonagall smile. "I figured you all would make that choice. Now, just a couple more things. As you recall, I said this has become something of an unofficial House..."

"Quidditch!" several voices said.

McGonagall nodded. "For now, South Wing is not in competition for the House Cup. The Quidditch Cup earns their House a hundred

points which in many years is the difference between winning the House Cup or not. I have no doubt South Wing can field a strong side. But how would we deal with those points? Then there is added a second consideration which is the fact that as far as we know, the students here are and will be the only South Wing students. On the surface, a South Wing team seems to be a short term thing, does it not?"

"You're just saying that 'cause you stand to lose most of next year's team!" Fred said.

"There is that, but Professor Sprout - who stands to lose no one as Mr. Diggory will finish this year - and Professor Flitwick - who stands to lose only Miss Chang if she makes the team - agree that this is the case. I'm sure Professor Snape will be in agreement as in addition to losing his Keeper in Miss Urquhart, he's not about to diminish his House's chances at that Cup by tolerating another complete team."

There were some groans, mostly from the "former" Gryffindors.

"Be that as it may, I shall make you this deal. For now, if you wish to play Quidditch, it will be for your original House team. But - and I don't see this as happening - should the Sorting Hat sort even a few students into South Wing next fall, you shall have your team, even if it means Gryffindor will be playing not to defend our Cup but to avoid last place. After all, if the Sorting Hat does so, South Wing becomes a true House."

"GO SORTING HAT!" Fred and George exclaimed.

"We have it all!" Fred said.

"Courage..." George added.

"Cunning!"

"Loyalty and a work ethic..."

"However misplaced the latter may seem, and..."

"We're all smart as whips!"

"And we'll be smoking hot with Quidditch!"

"SOUTH WING RULES!" the two added in unison.

"Oh to be younger!" Fred said.

"To be just eleven and awaiting our Hogwarts letter," George added.

"To come here and see the castle for the first time..."

"And then be the first sorted into South Wing!"

"The first South Wingers from start to finish!"

"Luxurious accommodations," George said.

"Totally brilliant Upperclassmen," Fred added.

"Lucky bastards."

"And a load of babies about," Ginny all but growled.

"But we love the little tykes," George said.

"House mascots for now," Fred added, "South Wingers in the future. Come on Gin! Both of us have changed our niece's nappies..."

"And the cheeky little bugger's done pissed all over me," George said.

"What're you complaining 'bout?" Daniel Urquhart said. "My big sister had a son and the cheeky little bugger's leaned to aim! Girls can't do THAT! Little bugger's a Marauder for certain, he is..." Daniel added proudly.

"Yes, yes," McGonagall said trying to overcome the laughter. "There is always that chance. But we can't count on it, can we? Still, I said this was almost a House and I meant it! Miss Bell?"

"Yes Professor?" Katie asked.

"By all rights - and had we a decent Board of Governors then - my recommendation that you be a Prefect should have been it! I

justified giving it to Leanne because you're a star Quidditch player. Deep down, I always knew I had broken and let the Purebloods get their way. After all, had you been selected, then a majority of your year's Prefects would have been Muggle Borns, but I digress. It was wrong not to stand up for you as you deserved it, Dumbledore and the former Board of Governors be damned! Miss Bell, as of tomorrow, you are our South Wing Prefect. I believe you lot will need at least one to protect you from the probable reaction to all this."

"I d-don't know what to say, Professor," Katie stammered. "Thank you. I'm honored."

"You deserve it Miss Bell. Miss Urquhart?"

"Yes Ma'am?" Lucinda replied.

"I cannot predict what Professor Snape will do when he learns of all of this and your role in it. However, whether he asks you to resign as Slytherin Prefect or whether you choose to, I am willing to offer you the position of our other South Wing Prefect."

"In that case," Lucinda nodded, "I will probably resign my position with Slytherin. I don't want to give him the satisfaction of taking my badge."

After a brief applause, Fred said: "What? No boy prefects?"

"Do you honestly think I'd put you or your brother in charge of discipline, Mr. Weasley?"

"Merlin forbid!"

"It would sully our hard won reputations," George added.

"I was actually thinking of Harry or Neville," Fred said.

"Despite their OWLs, Mr. Potter and Mr. Bottom remain Fourth Years officially," McGonagall said. "I cannot justify making either of them a Prefect at this time. And for your general information, while it is generally the practice for each house to have both a boy and a girl Prefect, it is by no means required. The reason for it is because the boys cannot enter the girls dormitories and the girls are not supposed to enter the boys dormitories, thus Prefects for those

dorms. That problem does not really exist here seeing that aside from the Lower Years, all the other students residing here are married, and the Lower Years all live on the Sixth Floor for now although they will move to the Fifth Floor once all the guests have left and their new rooms are readied."

"What about next year?" Ginny asked knowing Hermione was probably itching to but would not want to sound too eager.

"Miss Weasley," McGonagall said, "we generally do not discuss Prefect assignments with students and generally do not reveal the final decisions until after they have received their letters in the summer before their Fifth year. I can tell you that the preliminary decisions have been made, subject to change of course."

"It's been made?" Hermione asked.

"It's by no means final, Miss Granger. The Headmaster and Heads of Houses meet about midway through the Winter Term to discuss the next year's Prefect assignments - and Quidditch Captains if necessary. Those decisions are subject to change. A promising student might develop an attitude problem or there may be another reason to revisit the decision before the letters are sent. I will add that we do not meet to discuss next year's Head Boy and Head Girl until June. But we believe the lot of you are trustworthy and besides, I do intend to appoint two of our Fourth Years as South Wing Prefects. Remember, these decisions are not final and can change. In fact, it's not truly final until September 1st and students have been known to refuse to serve as Prefects on occasion.

"That being said, the probable Slytherin Prefects will be Mr. Malfoy and Miss Parkinson..."

"But Daphne and Tracey are much better students than either of them, as is Zabini!" Hermione protested. She knew the class ranks of everyone in her year.

"While academic performance is certainly a factor considered, it is not the only factor. The Headmaster and each Head of House look for additional qualities as well..."

"And Professor Snape is good friends with Draco's Mum and supposedly beholdng to Draco's father," Daphne said, "and he's Draco's Godfather."

"And Pansy's a good little Slytherin bint," Tracey added. "She worships the very ground Draco walks upon, hates all who are not true Slytherins and kisses the little ponce's bony little arse!"

"Not to mention that Professor Snape had made it clear to Tracey and me we lack a certain ... attitude."

"Meaning we do not and will not bow down to Draco," Tracey said.

"I agree that either Miss Davis or Miss Greengrass are better choices," McGonagall said, "but my opinion as to Slytherin's Prefects is of little import. The preliminary choices for Ravenclaw are Mr. Boot and Miss Patil and Professor Flitwick has advised me he will not withdraw his recommendation as to Miss Patil simply because she chose to get married at this time. The Preliminary choices for Hufflepuff are Mr. McMillan and Miss Bones and again, Miss Bones's recommendation will not be withdrawn. Finally - unless I can get Professor Dumbledore to change his mind between now and this summer - the proposed Gryffindor Prefects for next year are Miss Granger and Mr. Weasley."

Hermione wanted to jump for joy, until she heard the second name. "RON? But how?" she began. "He has the worst marks in our house and has lost almost as many points as Harry has! Harry's better! Neville's better! Heck, Seamus and Dean are better choices!"

"Oh the shame," the Twins moaned.

"Dumbledore's clearly gone round the twist," Ginny added. "About the only thing Ron'll do is dock Slytherins!"

"I would agree as to Mr. Potter for certain and now Mr. Longbottom. In fact, I made it clear at the time Mr. Potter was the only realistic option. That was before Mr. Longbottom became the young man we know today. As for Mr. Finnegan and Mr. Thomas, I felt their frequent visitations to various broom closets did not speak well for them."

"It makes no sense," Hermione began.

"Miss Granger, as I'm sure you are well aware, Mr. Weasley's academic performance is neither a reflection of his intellect or his potential ability, rather it's a reflection of his attitude. He is a classic underachiever and Professor Dumbledore felt making him a prefect might help him become more responsible."

"I don't see that happening just 'cause he gets a badge," Hermione said.

"I tend to agree with you, Miss Granger. I believe in time he may grow into his potential, but being a Prefect will not make that happen by itself."

"Why not Harry?"

McGonagall sighed. "Dumbledore felt that with all he's been through the last four years, he has enough on his mind as it is."

"He has a point," Harry chuckled.

"But that also justifies making you a Prefect," Hermione countered.

"I agree with Miss Granger," McGonagall said, "it certainly justifies making you a Prefect, but Dumbledore would prefer otherwise and I'm certain the real reason is not the one he gave."

"The bloody Prophecy," Harry growled.

"That is probably a fair bet," McGonagall replied. "Be that as it may, if I am unable to change his mind in this, I will be offering you the position as one of South Wing's Prefects, Mr. Potter."

"And the other?" Hermione asked.

"I was thinking of offering the other badge to Miss Greengrass."

"I think it should go to Neville," Daphne said. "I'm not saying I'd refuse, but that's how I think it should go. I would prefer not being offered a badge unless Harry does become a Gryffindor Prefect."

"And why is that?"



"For now, it makes sense," Daphne said. "Our other two prefects are girls and Lucinda is House Longbottom while Katie is House Potter and I think our new Prefects should also be from both Houses. It would also give us two boys and two girls, although as you noted that's not as critical here. If Harry becomes the Gryffindor Prefect, I could become the House Potter Prefect."

"I agree with Daphne," Harry said.

"All in favor?" Susan quipped. All of the students raised their hands as did most of the Professors. "Opposed?" There was no response. "I'd say that's a resounding yes!"

McGonagall almost smiled. "Very well. So be it." Following a loud ovation, she continued. "Over the next week, I ask all of the South Wing students to meet with your Professors here to pick up your assignments. Our Sixth Years need only meet with those Professors in those course where they did not earn their NEWTs."

"Assignments?" Daniel Urquhart asked.

"Yes, Mr. Urquhart. As you will learn, it is customary to have homework assignments over your summer breaks both to prepare you for next year's materials and to make sure you don't forget everything you worked so hard to learn and, as you will have a five month break from those courses, we feel these assignments are all the more important. Professor Lupin will have your Defense assignments and Madam Longbottom will be here next weekend for your Potions assignments.

"Next, all the House Longbottom and House Potter ladies and their children will have appointments with Madam Pomfrey on Monday. Healers Tonks and Turpin will be there and a schedule will be posted later this evening. Madam Pomfrey will be taking over as your initial care Healer, at least while you are here at Hogwarts and this appointment is for a check up and to make sure she has your current Healing records.

"Finally, while Time Compression ends at ten tomorrow morning, the Spring Holiday does not end until seven tomorrow evening when all students are expected to be back and in the Great Hall for dinner. I invite those parents who wish to dine with us at the South Wing

table tomorrow evening. In the meantime, you may tour the rest of the Castle and the grounds with your children. You may also venture into Hogsmeade if you so desire. All Middle and Upper Years may treat this as a Hogsmeade weekend if they desire. All Lower Years also have my permission to head into the village if they are accompanied by an adult, and that would include your older sisters."

"YES!" Jason Lee called out. "ZONKO'S!"

SUNDAY, APRIL 2nd, 1995 - THE BURROW

Following the dinner, there was a Weasley Family meeting. Arthur had decided to forego the next day. He needed to be with Molly and he needed to be the one to explain all this to her and he knew her. It would take time. Whatever problems he may have had with what Ginny had done were well in the past for him. He was now so proud of her! She was a wonderful Mum, even if still young and her Husband and new family were all wonderful young people. But Molly knew none of this and that would be an issue and Arthur felt he should be the one to break all of this to her. He hoped, in the end, the only thing she would regret about any of this was missing the weddings and her granddaughter's birth. Bill and Ginny were planning on taking the Delacours and Marcellas around the school. Ginny would leave little Hermione with her elves, whom the little girl adored. She needed to know that Hermione could be her own person and that she could be her own too, from time to time. The Twins would be off to London with their wives to buy rings with a loan from Harry for that purpose. Arthur would deal with Molly.

Molly had always had a temper. She could fly off the handle quite easily. But her spirit was one of the many things Arthur loved about her and, unlike many girls he had known in school, once she vented she was fine again. She seldom had held any kind of grudge against anyone other than those who persisted in holding one against her or her family. Arthur knew Molly loved him dearly, but he also knew she had ghosts and those drove her. She was the last Prewitt. She came from a long line of Ministry people and her line was wiped out in the War. This was her motivation. This was why she felt her children should all strive to work for the Ministry and why she was so loyal to Dumbledore. She did not want to ever think her beloved brothers died in vain. Arthur knew he was going to have to crush all those thoughts to get her to accept what had happened and he was not looking forward to it. But he had accepted it. Neville was a wonderful

young man and of that he had no doubt. He was perfect for Ginny and a wonderful father as well and this Plural Marriage thing did not seem to change that. Ginny had said that Neville had always made her feel special even when she did not believe it herself. And the Twins and Bill had also married lovely girls. In Arthur's mind, as unorthodox as it all was, his children had done exceedingly well in that regard. But now he had to convince Molly. He knew that if she was, she would be heartbroken in any case. Molly had been a wonderful mother and would be broken by the fact that she missed the weddings and the birth of her granddaughter.

"Mols?" he called out as he stepped through the Burrow's Floo, "I'm back!"

"In the kitchen," her voice answered. He entered and saw she was magically doing the dishes. "Did you have a good time? And where's Bill?"

"Yes," Arthur said. "And Bill's staying up there for a bit. Is Ron around, or Percy?"

"Ron and his friends just left," Molly said. "They're going to spend some time in Hogsmeade. I believe Percy's upstairs working on something."

"We need to talk, Molly," Arthur said.

"What did Fred and George do?" she practically hissed back.

"Nothing," Arthur replied. "It's not about them."

"THEN WHAT?" Molly all but yelled.

"The Contract," Arthur replied. "Ginny and Harry found out about it and Harry knows about his vault."

Molly paled. "They know?" she almost squeaked.

Arthur nodded. "And he knows about the 5,000 Galleon withdrawal."

"But... Arthur! There's no way out of it! I've looked and checked! There's no way out! We had to..."

"Mols?" Arthur began.

"There's no way out! Arthur? You know I would have loved to have Harry as a Son-in-Law. He's a wonderful boy and he and Ginny might well have got on well. But she's... and he's... they're not moving that way and then Dumbledore comes and says they must and... It's so WRONG, Arthur! I don't want my baby all drugged up and not Harry either! They're friends, but if that's all that it was meant to be... It's so WRONG! Ginny has a good boyfriend in that Neville boy, 'though I know little 'bout him. What I've heard is... he sounds like a good boy. And I've known Harry and Hermione and... IT'S SO WRONG! BUT WHAT CAN WE DO? We have to do this, Arthur! It's wrong! Harry and Ginny deserve better! But..." Molly was crying now.

"But what?" Arthur replied.

"There's no way out! Dumbledore said so! We're so stuck! I feel so DIRTY! I had to take money from Harry's vault to hope to retain a Potions Master - I was not about to let Professor Snape anywhere near my baby or Harry - and ... I don't want to do this, Arthur! Not to Harry! Not to my baby! They ... they deserve their own lives! But we can't afford the penalties! We can't! Not even if I drained Harry's vault and Arthur I already feel so guilty for what I have done! There's no way out!"

"What if I told you there was?"

"But there isn't!" Molly protested. "That damnable contract...!"

"There is and was and Ginny and some others found it and fixed it for themselves and us as well," Arthur said.

"But that's impossible! Dumbledore made it unbreakable!"

"He missed a few points, it seems," Arthur said. "That contract is no longer worth the parchment it's written upon, although the solution is almost as shocking as the problem. Have a seat Mols."

"S-solution?" She asked. "But how can you void...?"

"Have a seat Mols. We have a lot to talk about."

Arthur had much to tell her, of course. He had the Lovegoods' book and his own photo albums as back-up, and he told his wife everything. He told her about Dumbledore and all his mistakes regarding Harry and how that Contract was just another one of them. He showed her the pictures and told her of all the weddings he attended and how she now had a Son-In-Law and three Daughters-In-Law and about all of them. She was taken aback to learn Fleur was a Veela, but he told her what that really was, just a type of magic passed from mother to daughter and nothing more, really. It of course helped that Fleur was the daughter of Alaine Delacour, Deputy Minister for Magic of France. It all but broke her in the end.

"It's all that damnable Dumbledore's fault this happened!" she exclaimed. "I missed my own babies weddings and the birth of my own granddaughter and their school results and... I'm so proud of them, Arthur, I really am, but they're all so young and how does Ginny take being one of nine wives?"

"It seems quite well," Arthur said. "Neville is an exceptional lad despite his apparent youth and you'd never know. But I never asked."

"WHY NOT?"

"Mols, Ginny is still and will always be my little girl. All evidence to the contrary, I still see her as just that and don't want to think about HOW she had our granddaughter. I don't ask those questions. And I don't feel I have to yet as she seems quite happy about the whole thing and she's a wonderful Mum to little Hermione."

"She can't cook!"

"She's getting better," Arthur said, "Although she does have elves for that. She's focusing on being able to bake cookies and cakes and such for her kids as treats. She hopes to be good enough at that when little Hermione is old enough..."

"I missed all of this!" Molly said. "I missed their weddings and my granddaughter's birth! Oh, Arthur! Ginny was so beautiful! And our boys were so dashing! I ... I want to make it up to all of them! I want to see them, Arthur! I want them to ... to forgive me. I want to meet their ... I want to meet them all, Arthur. Dumbledore's all but ruined our family and I want ... I want to apologize to them all! I want to see

my granddaughter! Oh, damn it all to hell!" she added running up the stairs.

"Mols?" Arthur asked a little while later. She was busy writing.

"I'm sending them letters begging them to forgive me. Every bleeding one of them!" she added almost in tears. "Harry, Hermione, Ginny, Fred, George, Bill... And Dumbledore is going to get the Howler of Howlers for this! HOW DARE HE DENY ME THIS? They're MY BABIES! And his STUPID ideas kept me AWAY! That damnable CONTRACT!"

Arthur closed the door and smiled. His true Molly was back!

SUNDAY, APRIL 2nd, 1995 - THE GREAT HALL, HOGWARTS  
SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY

One of the nice things about a Holiday was that most students were not in the school if they could help it. For the most part, the Common Rooms and dorms were only occupied by the First and Second Years who had not gone home so that few in the school had any clue about what was coming. Many of the girls had brought their parents and children to their "former" House Common Rooms and dorms and few seemed to notice. Many others strolled about Hogsmeade village with their child or children and again, they seemed to go unnoticed. South Wing had slipped beneath notice, but now it was certainly about to change.

"Got a seat for ya, Harry!" Ron Weasley called out as Harry entered the Great Hall.

"Sorry, Ron," he replied. "I'm told to sit elsewhere."

"What are you on about, Mate?"

"Just what I said," Harry replied heading off to the new South Wing table. Unfortunately, Ron followed.

"Bugger, Mate," he said, "what you sitting here for?"

"You'll soon find out," Daphne replied.

"You're here with Slytherins?" Ron all but shrieked.

"Want me to hex him Harry?" Rosie asked.

"Ron, you'll soon enough find out why I'm here," Harry said. "Get back to your table..."

"And what are these babies doing here?" Ron asked indignantly for indeed there were already a fair few present..

"Hex him, Rosie," Harry said softly. Ron immediately learned that Ginny had apparently taught a Slytherin her Bat Bogie Hex.

"Bugger! What's this about?" Ron all but cried.

"This ain't your table, Ron," Ginny said. "And your attitude is bothersome!"

Ron looked at Harry and he nodded. Ron decided not to try and figure this out and skulked back to the Gryffindor table but wondered what had just happened.

"Mister Potter," a silky yet evil sounding voice hissed, "having your own House Mates hexed for your amusement?" Professor Snape asked.

"Hey Snivelus!" Sirius Black said, "I see you still have a pathological fear of soap related products!"

Before Professor Snape could respond, the nearby Hufflepuff and Gryffindor tables broke out in laughter.

"BLACK!" Snape began as he pulled his wand, "I have you now!"

But he did not. He soon saw several wands were upon him including several adults.

"Sheath it or drop it, Death Eater!" a voice called and Snape saw its owner. It was Amelia Bones, Head of DMLE. "You're under Dumbledore's protection, are you not?" she said with her wand leveled at him. He nodded. "And that's the only reason why I don't drop you where you stand or have you dropped! Who did you murder to get your mark? Who did you rape? You set foot off this ground and I will have you hauled in, find out and see to it you at best spend your remaining days as a guest of the Dementors! DROP YOUR WAND! NOW!"

"But Madam Bones," he replied, "it's the mass Murderer Sirius Black!"

"You have his name right, Death Eater," Amelia replied. "And that is as far as you are capable of going. I have highly credible information from many sources including from within the Ministry that the accusations against him are entirely without merit! He also happens to be under the protection of several Ancient and Noble Houses, as well as Hogwarts. You, however, are a known, marked Death Eater guilty of capital crimes just to earn your mark despite your patron's



assurances. Set foot off of his grounds, and you will rot in Azkaban. Now be off, or I shall authorize my Auror to take action!"

"Very well," Severus drawled returning his wand to within his robes. "I trust you will be taking him with you when you depart?"

"And why would I do that?" Madam Bones asked.

"He is an escaped convict."

"As he was never convicted of any crime or misdemeanor, by definition he cannot be a convict. And while it is true he some how managed to release himself from Azkaban on his own recognizance, that was not then nor is it now a crime."

"You're just going to let him go?" Snape asked in an almost incredulous tone.

"In a manner of speaking," Amelia said. "He has agreed to take up residence here with his family. As this includes a cousin of his who is a fully qualified Auror, it means I will know where to find him should the need arise. Think of it as a mild form of House Arrest."

Severus glared for a moment. "As I see DMLE has this matter well in hand..." he then spun and stalked off towards his seat at the Head Table.

"He really is a greasy git, isn't he?" Robert Granger remarked. Although Hermione never used that particular term with respect to their Potions Professor, just about every other student in the South Wing had done so on more than one occasion. "How does he do that robe thing?" he added.

"It's not natural," Hermione replied. "We think he has them charmed or something."

"Your attention please," McGonagall began. She was standing at a podium, one usually occupied by their Headmaster, but as he was away it was not unusual to see her there. "I hope you all have enjoyed your Holiday and are ready to resume classes tomorrow morning. And I do hope, as many other professors do as well, that you have completed your assigned homework or that you will do so this evening."

Ron frowned. He had not even started any of his three assignments and doubted Hermione would help him.

"As you all may have noticed, we have a fifth table tonight off to my left. That table will remain for the foreseeable future. The students seated there shall have the privilege of remaining there for meals. The remainder of those sitting with them are family and friends of family who enjoyed this weekend with their children. After tonight, seating at that table is reserved for them and for their guests which will be by invitation only."

"What a load of rubbish!" a student called out.

"But it is not," McGonagall said. "While the rest of you enjoyed your Holiday, the students at our new table were working very hard on their classes with the assistance of several Hogwarts Professors, Madam Maxime of Beauxbatons and several Masters in their fields. All thirty-seven students you see there, be they Hogwarts, Beauxbatons or Durmstrang or its sister school have passed out of their years in the following courses: Arithmancy, Ancient Runes, Charms, Defense Against the Dark Arts, Herbology, Potions and Transfiguration and will not be required to attend those classes - or hand in any outstanding homework assignments - for the remainder of this year. They will be expected to do so for any remaining classes.

"Furthermore, will our Upper Years rise?" The eight rose. Ron looked and saw the Twins were among them. "These eight young people took their NEWTs this weekend and did remarkably well on all of them. I particularly wish to single out Mr. Diggory, who despite not sitting for NEWT Potions classes, managed and Outstanding on that exam.

"Will our Middle Years please rise?" The twenty-one did so. Ron's jaw dropped when he saw Ginny was among them. "These twenty-one students - nineteen from Hogwarts and two from Beauxbatons all took and excelled in seven OWLs. All had an Exceeds Expectations or better, all received at least one Outstanding With Distinction, and all had an Outstanding or better in Potions," she added that for Professor Snape. "But there are a few in particular I wish to single out. Miss Gabrielle Delacour of Beauxbatons took French National Honors in Ancient Runes and Transfiguration. Miss

Michelle Marcella of Beauxbatons took French National Honors in Defense Against the Dark Arts and Potions. Miss Padma Patil and Miss Daphne Greengrass tied for British National Honors in Arithmancy. Miss Ginevra Weasley took International Honors in Charms."

Ron almost choked on the chicken leg he was eating. None of his brothers had managed National Honors, much less International ones.

"Mr. Harry Potter took International Honors in Defense Against the Dark Arts," McGonagall continued. "Mr. Neville Longbottom took International Honors in Herbology. Miss Lucinda Urquhart took International Honors in Potions. And finally, Miss Hermione Granger took International Honors in both Ancient Runes and Transfiguration. I congratulate them all.

"Now don't think this all happened overnight, although it did. Since March 19th, the students at this table have used a specific kind of magic that gave them, and those of us who joined them either on Friday or yesterday morning, a lot of time. It ranged from between fifteen and twenty-seven months depending upon the person. In real time, the babies you see here were all conceived between Wednesday and yesterday and all born either yesterday or this morning and yet by age they are all between a month and a half and seven months old. Their Birth Certificates all show they were born here at Hogwarts, and that includes the seven new Muggle Borns."

"You mean there are Muggles here?" Draco called out. "But there can't be! It's against policy!"

"You are quite mistaken, Mr. Malfoy. It is only in recent years that has been the case. Muggle parents were always allowed to visit the school and, once we had the Hogwarts Express, were always brought here the summer before their first child's First Year and allowed to come here for weekends. That policy has never changed, although Professor Dumbledore stopped the practice around thirty-five years ago."

"That's ridiculous!" Malfoy said. "Wait 'til my Father hears of this! He and the Board of Governors will not allow this place to be sullied by..."

"Detention, Malfoy!" McGonagall said. "And you are denied access to the mails for a month as is the rest of your House! Your attitude is none of my concern, and neither is your father's or the former Board of Governors!" This started some whispers throughout the four House tables, but McGonagall did not explain.

"You can't cut off their mail," Snape began.

"Oh, but I can," McGonagall said, "at least until tomorrow I am acting Headmistress. That being said, I am sure Dumbledore will uphold the punishment once all the relevant facts are known to him. And don't push it, Severus. Madam Bones would love nothing more than to haul you away, interrogate you, try you, convict you and throw away the key to your cell in Azkaban, assuming you don't get a date with an amorous Dementor!"

Something had changed in McGonagall, Snape thought. She had never liked him, but she had also never come down on him so directly and certainly not in front of the students, not since he had been named Head of Slytherin House. Then again, he was under Dumbledore's protection. Snape wondered. She clearly had a new alliance or patron, one who did not fear Dumbledore in the least. Not even the Dark Lord was that powerful. There was always the possibility she had lost it and gone 'round the twist as it were, but Snape felt there was more to this. He kept his mouth shut and observed, much to the consternation of Draco who assumed he would stand up and defend him.

McGonagall then began introducing the guests that had been hosted, most were parents or guardians of the students at the South Wing table and the others were family friends, to include two members of the Examining Board who had given many of the students their OWLs or NEWTs exams and had verified the scores. This introduction included thirteen of the thirty-six babies in the Hall, a point one Lavender Brown noted with interest and passed on to her roommate Sally-Anne and anyone else who would listen to her discreet comments. She was hardly the only one.

McGonagall then went through the marriages that had occurred. The students cheered for Professor Lupin and his new wife Dora. The boys cheered for Victor and his wife Katya, although the girls were more subdued. The girls cheered for Bill Weasley and his new wife, but the boys were similarly subdued and Ron was clearly confused

as to how his brother could land the Veela bird when he could not. There were cheers also for Fred and George, although some of the Gryffindors wondered what it meant to have married couples on their Quidditch team.

"Next, Lord Sirius Black, Head of the Ancient and Noble House of Black..."

"WHAT?" a voice called. Malfoy was standing. "But he can't be! He's a convict! A criminal! He was disowned! I'm supposed to be the next Lord Black! Mother and Father say it's so!"

Before McGonagall could reply there was a laugh from the other side of the Hall and a lady stood. It was Andromeda Tonks. "You must be my nephew Draco Malfoy," she said. "It shows. My dear sister Narcissa never paid attention to details. Apparently it is a trait she passed on to you. Let us begin with your first contention, that Lord Black is a convict. To be a convict, you must have been convicted of a crime which also means you must have had a trial. Lord Black was never tried, much less convicted. He was sent to Azkaban without trial and forgotten, at least until he managed to escape. Now I know our Minister for Magic has said that he's a criminal, a convict and a Death Eater. But Fudge is a politician and being both accurate and objective with facts has never been his strong suit. As for being a criminal, that does not result in disinheritance unless one is sentenced to disenfranchisement. After all, your father was a Death Eater, a per se criminal regardless of his excuses and yet you did not lose your vaults or your property, did you?

"As for being disowned. Yes. Dear Aunt Walburga loved to think she could do such a thing. Then again, she was neither the sharpest of creatures nor entirely sane. The right to disown at any level rests solely with the head of the family and, in the case of an Ancient and Noble House, the Head of House and she was neither. From 1952 until his death in 1991, the Head of the Ancient and Noble House of Black was Arcturus Black, Sirius Black's Grandfather. Only he could truly disown a Black. He disowned one: Walburga. He disowned her because she violated House Law when she encouraged her younger son Regulus to become a Death Eater. It was and is still against Black Family Law for any male with a possible claim to Head of House status to become a Death Eater. Don't get me wrong. Arcturus Black was a right Pureblood bigoted bastard. But he was

not about to risk the disenfranchisement of his entire line for some upstart, no named Dark Lord who killed almost as many Purebloods as he did others of what you would call lesser bloodlines.

"So, as Sirius was neither disowned by his Head of House nor disenfranchised - and had that happened there would be nothing to inherit as it would have resulted in the confiscation of all Black titles, rights, positions, properties and vaults - since neither happened, Sirius is rightfully Lord Black and his son James the Heir Apparent. That's right! Son! Lord Black married the widow Marilyn Abbott, mother of your classmate Hannah, and they recently had a son.

"But even if that had not been the case, you were not the next in line, Draco. You and Lord Black share two common ancestors. One is your Great-grandfather and his Grandfather Pollux Black, but that one does not count as it is his maternal line and his claim stems from his father's line, not his mother's. Your other common ancestor was Phineas Nigellus Black; considered the worst Headmaster in Hogwarts History he is your Great-great-great Grandfather and Sirius's Great-great Grandfather. Phineas had five children. Sirius is descended from the oldest son and you from the youngest. The other three either have no surviving descendant or their surviving lines were disowned before 1952, otherwise Neville Longbottom or Arthur Weasley would be next in line behind Sirius. All that's left then are the descendants of Cygnus Black, your Great-great grandfather.

"You are the son of the youngest daughter of the youngest son. If I had a son, even now, his claim would be superior to yours. Moreover, if your Grandfather's or greater Grandfather's older brother has a grandson, that lad's claim is senior to yours and that is the case as Alphard Black's daughter Vivian Greengrass recently had a son Marcus. The Greengrass line is senior to your's, Draco. Of course, all of this is academic if Cygnus Black has a surviving Great-grandson which he does. His daughter Dorea married Charlus Potter and they are Harry Potter's grandparents, so your line is actual junior to two other lines. You weren't even close to being the next Lord Black.

"All of this is quite academic. Since Sirius Black is the Head of the Ancient and Noble House of Black, you have no claim at all and, since he has a son, that cuts you off completely. Under our law, we can only look back as far as the Heir Apparent's Great-Great

Grandfather to search for heirs. James Black is now heir apparent and his Great-Great Grandfather was another Sirius Black who, aside from Sirius and now James, has no surviving descendants. Unless Lord Black designated an alternate successor line in his Will, House Black is now limited to him, his wife and his son for the purposes of Heirs. We are still technically members from his mother's side, but with no right of inheritance. Being a member of an Ancient and Noble House is determined by those descended from the Head of House's Great-great Grandfather but successor lines from the Heir Apparent's."

"Wait 'til my father hears of this!" a voice said, but it wasn't Malfoy's. Pansy Parkinson stood, threw what looked like a ring at Malfoy's head and stormed out of the Hall.

Lavender could still count, there were many babies unaccounted for. And then, McGonagall began the introduction of House Longbottom. Ron had to be silenced when he learned the only way Ginny could have married Neville was to get pregnant first. He didn't seem to care he was now an uncle or that his father and brothers approved. Others were simply shocked that Neville even had a girlfriend, much less nine and nine wives and eleven children. Harry clinched it. No one was really surprised to learn he had managed to marry Hermione except Ron for he had seen Hermione as his girl. Their twins were unsurprising as well to everyone but Ron. But Harry also now eight other wives and the two Slytherins and one Veela and Ron's Yule Ball date were too much for Ron, he stormed out of the Hall muttering about how Harry got everything, totally ignoring the fact that Neville had as much as well, one noticed by Dean and Seamus, Ron's two remaining roommates.

Professor Snape did not believe much of what McGonagall had said. He was more than willing to believe Potter would impregnate nine young witches and drag Longbottom into his sick little club for kicks. If anything, the boy was even more arrogant than his father. He was also willing to believe that the babies were as McGonagall claimed. But there was no way Potter was married! Moreover, he didn't buy McGonagall's explanation that this all happened over the last few days. She was just covering for the flagrant misconduct of her favorite students and others who were somehow hoodwinked into this. Snape was certain the lot of them had been carrying on for ages and that the babies were either snuck into the castle over the Holiday or had been here all along, hidden in some out of the way

classroom. The list of rules, even laws that had been violated were sure to convince Dumbledore to expel the lot of them.

MONDAY, APRIL 3rd, 1995 - HOGWARTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY.

Madam Pomfrey had not been at the dinner the night before. She had three students in the Hospital Wing for various reasons and she only appeared at meals when the Hospital Wing was empty. When Dumbledore returned to Hogwarts late that evening, there were three notes from her about each of the patients who had arrived during the Holiday. There was also a note from McGonagall, a very cryptic one about events that had occurred over the weekend and the need to discuss new living accommodations for several students. A meeting between himself, the four Heads of Houses and Madam Pomfrey had been scheduled for the next afternoon. It was to be held in the South Wing, which struck Dumbledore as odd. But, "given the number of students involved, your office would be unsatisfactory and given the sensitive nature of the discussions, it would be best to hold the meeting somewhere where other students might not overhear," she had written. He had also received a long note from Professor Snape, accusing Harry Potter and Neville Longbottom of running a bawdy house for well over a year, getting several female students pregnant, including many from respectable families and harboring and escaped convict within the Castle. It further accused Professor McGonagall of condoning the misconduct and conspiring to keep it covered up. Naturally, he recommended expelling all the students involved.

Breakfast at Hogwarts was when the mails were delivered. Dumbledore received twenty identical envelopes from Gringotts. He only opened the first one and read the cover letter. It stated that enclosed were necessary notifications of the change in status of a student. He did not read any further. It could wait until after breakfast. It was not unusual to receive such notices after the Holidays as young couples of age were known to marry, as well as some sixteen years olds in betrothal contracts. But twenty seemed a bit off. Dumbledore would spend the morning reading the notices. He really could do little more as the other Professors would be busy with classes until the time for the meeting. He certainly could see that Severus might have a point for once.



The meeting was not until four in the afternoon. For Madam Pomfrey, however, what could have been a quiet day was not. While her patients from the Holiday had been discharged and there were no accidents in Potions or Care of Magical Creatures which usually sent her a student a week, she found herself inundated with appointments. She met with two attending Healers and a total of forty-patients, eighteen students and their twenty-two babies.

Despite being allowed out of several classes, aside from the Sixth Year students, all the student residents of the South Wing had at least one class to attend. The First Years had Astronomy, with Gryffindor and Hufflepuff attending a morning class while Ravenclaw and Slytherin would be in the Astronomy tower after sunset. They alternated each week. The Second Years had History of Magic in the morning in two separate classes, but had the afternoon off. The Third Years had Muggle Studies in the morning and Care of Magical Creatures in the afternoon. For the Fourth Years in the classes, it was Care of Magical Creatures in the morning and double divination in the afternoon. For the Fifth Years, it was Divination in the morning and Muggle Studies in the afternoon. Several of the South Wing students took advantage of their time off to return to their former dormitories and pick up anything that had not already been moved to the Wing. For the most part, this meant pets, although the owls remained in the owlery. By early afternoon, Hermione's cat Crookshanks and seven other cats were prowling the South Wing while Neville's toad Trevor was making himself at home in the Greenhouse.

For Harry, Care of Magical Creatures was fine. Even though Ron and the other Gryffindors were in the class, he did not have to deal with them. Divination was a nightmare, however. In addition to Trelawney's most recent prediction of his imminent demise, he was partnered with Ron who clearly wanted nothing to do with his former friend. That and they were next to Parvati and Lavender and Lavender was trying to get Parvati to tell her all about what was happening.

Dumbledore met his four Heads of Houses and Madam Pomfrey in his office. He handed each of them a stack of documents. These were the Marriage Certificates and Emancipation Decrees he had received from Gringotts. In return, McGonagall handed him a large stack of additional documents, and a smaller stack to Professor

Snape. These were the Wedding Certificates, Birth Certificates, OWLs results and exam scores for the students in the South Wing.

"If we are to be at the appointed place at the appointed time, we do not have time to read through these, Severus," Dumbledore said. "I would rather not be late. You know where this place is, Minerva?"

McGonagall nodded and led them to an empty corridor.

"Are we to have the meeting here?" Dumbledore asked.

"Professors?" a voice asked.

"Miss Weasley?" Dumbledore replied.

"Welcome to the South Wing," she said and an open doorway appeared in the wall behind her. She passed through it and the others followed.

Dumbledore walked into the large salon with the four heads of Houses and Madam Pomfrey. He could see that Harry, Neville and all their "wives" were present, seated in chairs arranged in a half circle. There were five chairs facing the students and Dumbledore could not help but snort. He had come here to question these students yet it looked like he might be the one on trial. The arrangement certainly was not designed to place him in a powerful or comfortable position and he recalled a story of a Muggle who, while powerful, was not intimidating looking. One trick he had used was a chair for his guests whose front legs were slightly shorter than the back, thus ensuring the guest could never get comfortable. It was said to be an effective technique.

"Please, have a seat," Harry said in a very neutral voice.

Another interesting ploy, Dumbledore thought. A subtle reminder that I am in what he considers his place of comfort. Dumbledore and the others sat and Harry and the others waited silently.

"I assume you are all aware that you have violated numerous school rules and not to mention a few laws as well?" Dumbledore began.

"And what rules would those be?" Hermione asked.

"Don't be insolent!" Snape shot back.

"Severus!" Dumbledore said. "Let's begin with perhaps the least disturbing, shall we?" He continued looking around. "I am fairly certain this was not how I last saw this wing. You confiscate and entire wing of the school for your own personal use?"

"We had permission, Sir," Hermione said.

"Permission?" Dumbledore and Severus replied in disbelief. Neither noticed that McGonagall was blushing a little.

"When Harry was forced into this dreadful competition, Professor McGonagall gave us permission to utilize any suitable, unused space to practice and train. We had a classroom at first, but it was insufficient for our needs and I found this place, which was more than suitable and was also unused."

"I'm sure she didn't mean..." Albus began.

"Be that as it may, Albus, I also did not place a restriction on where they trained or how much space they used. Only that it was a space not currently in use. Sorry."

"And the privacy wards?" Albus said.

"Again, that was my suggestion, Albus. Although I certainly would not imagine they would have managed to place it under a Fidelity Charm."

Dumbledore turned and looked at his Deputy in disbelief. She merely nodded at him with a slight smirk on her face.

"Who?" Dumbledore began.

"Miss Granger cast it," Flitwick responded. "Most excellent. If they evade expulsion I plan to award her 500 points as no student has ever mastered such an advance charm."

"Neither have most adults," Dumbledore nodded. "And Miss Weasley is the Secret Keeper I take it?"

Ginny nodded.

"I would have guessed Harry myself," Dumbledore noted more to himself than anyone else.

"At the time the charm was cast," Hermione said, "we knew occlumency, but Neville and Harry did not."

"And now?"

"They do."

"It takes months even for one with talent to master even the basics," Snape interjected. "That means you've been using this place since last fall at least! Well that explains part of this then! How you managed to hide your pregnancies from the entire staff is beyond me. But if you've had this place long enough for Potter and Longbottom to learn the basics of Occlumency - and I seriously doubt they have but will give your explanation a modicum of respect - then that was how you were able to hide the births and those children! They've been here the whole time! Still ... given their apparent ages ... it stands to reason the lot of you were carrying on like a harlot house since last school year!"

"Severus!" Dumbledore said in a louder voice. "But he does have a point. Although it concerns me greatly. Giving birth without medical attention is most unwise and some of you if not all of you were probably in school when it occurred. That, and while not a parent myself, I am aware and infants - and particularly newborn infants - require a significant amount of care throughout the day and night, and yet your attendance records would suggest you all but abandoned them!"

"They all have been examined, haven't they?" Hermione asked.

"Of course," Madam Pomfrey said.

"And?" Dumbledore asked.

"The children are all quite healthy and happy. Quite magical too. I understand your concerns, Headmaster, but so far as my evaluation has revealed ... there are a lot of parents whose children are not nearly as well cared for as these. That they are all still in school is a credit to them, despite the circumstances.

"But none of this makes sense, Albus! The children would have been born in here at school during the fall! Severus is right. That places conception sometime last winter! But I've examined all these girls! You might be able to hide a pregnancy from others, but not from a Healer. Besides, as late as their last examination last month, each of them were still intact and still on their potions! The anti-conception potion takes three months to wear off and I would have known if it had!"

"This might help explain things," Hermione said. She handed the Professor several sheets of parchment. "Don't worry. They're copies for our school records although I'm pretty sure the Ministry will also be sending copies. They did notify you already?"

Albus nodded. "I received notifications of your marriages in this morning's post."

Albus looked at the first parchment. It was a certificate from Gringotts of Marriage stating that Harry James Potter and Hermione Jane Granger were lawfully married pursuant to Sections 14 and 16 and 29 of the Marriage Code. The marriage was completed at Gringotts Bank, London. The second said they were also magically married at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry by an authorized binder. It was Professor McGonagall.

"You knew?" Dumbledore asked.

McGonagall nodded.

There were two parchments which had also been filed with the Ministry stating that Harry and Hermione were legally adults. Then there was a birth certificate for Robert James Potter and Lily Rose Potter, born at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry South Wing Maternity Section at 1756 (5:56 P.M.) on April 1st, 1995 signed by Healer Theodore Tonks, St. Mungos, attending Healer. Albus now looked back at the other parchments noting the dates and he also noticed that the Magical Marriage Certificate was witnessed by Hermione's parents and Sirius Black, as Head of the Ancient and Noble House of Black of which Harry headed a cadet line with inheritance rights. The conditions allowing for minor consent were verified as of March 29th, 1995. The legal marriage

and emancipation occurred and was recorded on March 30th. The magical marriage and the birth both occurred on April 1st.

"Time compression," Albus chuckled.

"Headmaster?" Snape asked.

"This room is, or rather was under a time compression ward, am I right Miss Granger - or should I say Mrs. Potter."

Hermione nodded. "Actually, I suppose it's Lady Potter, but for now Miss Granger may be less confusing."

"Oh?" Dumbledore noted he still held a sizable number of parchments. He handed the ones he had read to McGonagall and continued to read. There was a legal marriage certificate between Harry and Hannah Abbott pursuant to sections 14, 16, 26, 27, 29 and 32 of the Marriage Code, her emancipation papers, their magical marriage certificate witnessed by Hannah mother and Sirius Black and the birth certificate for her son Charles Edward Abbott born at 1810 (6:10 P.M.) on April 1st. The next stack was for Luna Lovegood, married under sections 14, 16, 28, 29 and 32 of the Marriage Code, her emancipation papers, her magical marriage witnessed by her father and Sirius Black and the birth certificate for her daughter Delilah born at 1822 (6:22 P.M.) April 1st. There was similar paperwork for all the other girls and all of their children as well.

"What was your compression ratio?" Dumbledore asked.

"One minute outside was twelve hours in here," Hermione said.

"I see. How long?"

"Outside time? A total of twenty-seven hours for the girls, twenty-four for Harry and Neville and fifteen for the guests who joined us on Saturday. Our time was 780 days for the girls, or about two years and two months, 720 days for the boys, or just short of two years, and 450 days for the others or about one year and three months."

"Well, that certainly explains how you managed what you managed," Dumbledore said. "And how did you otherwise use your time?"

"Sir?"

"I would like to think that this was not some hormonal teenaged bordello, as Severus suggested. You did use this time in a more productive manner, did you not?"

Hermione nodded. "The - er - teenage bordello was not the major occupation. We used most of the time for research, education and training."

"I see."

"I have their OWL's results," McGonagall said. "Copies are among the documents I gave you. They'll be official later this week, but we did have examining board members present to administer them."

"I see," Dumbledore said, "and why have you done this?"

"Harry entered this tournament at a significant disadvantage," Hermione replied. "The fact that he's done well so far does not mean he that he has overcome those disadvantages and, as we as yet have no idea what the Third Task will require, the more Harry learns, the better prepared he will be before we need to focus on the Task itself."

"I see, so you spent the majority of those two years or so in this room..."

"Wing, Sir," Hermione corrected. "The entire Wing is under the wards and was under time compression. We first activated that ward on March 19th. It was only us girls then and we were only here for about an hour a day in outside time."

"Or a month in here," Dumbledore said. "How did you eat?"

"We each had thirty days camp rations that first day. By the second day, our kitchens and store rooms were set up in the basement and our elves made our meals. We spent eleven months renovating this wing for our needs. We began in the basement and worked up. The basement, as I said, has our kitchens, storerooms for food and potion supplies - all under stasis charms - store rooms for non-perishable supplies of various sorts, and living quarters for our elves."

"So you admit to stealing food and Potions supplies," Snape cried out almost in glee.

"The camp rations were purchased, along with other supplies," Hermione said. "The general food stores were obtained from Food Distribution for the most part and the rest purchased. To be honest, Hogwarts food larders fell far short of our projected requirements. As for the Potions ingredients, initial supplies were obtained from the student practice pantry which are available to all students and yet underutilized. The bulk of our ingredients were purchased."

"And the furniture and the like?" Snape asked.

"Transfigured junk, mostly," Hermione said. "Some were conjured. Some were also purchased. The magic of Hogwarts and this region combined with Elf magic made the changes more or less permanent."

"You still stole our junk!" Snape said.

"Actually," McGonagall replied, "upon reflection, that fell within the scope of my permissions."

After a pause, Dumbledore asked: "And the rest of this wing?"

"The Ground Floor has our magical reference library, a few classrooms, some training rooms, a gym and swimming pool, our potions lab and our hospital wing, which was set up with an eye towards maternity issues. This floor is our Common Room, although it really has several rooms including our dining hall. This is where we can relax and mingle. The Second and Third Floors contains the private apartments for House Longbottom and House Potter. The Fourth and Fifth Floors have additional guest suites. Finally, the top floor has been turned into a greenhouse. It was also during that time when we completed the warding."

"And you were involved as well, Harry?"

"No Sir," Harry replied. "The renovations were pretty much complete when Ginny and Hermione first brought Neville and I here on March 29th. We were told about this place that morning at breakfast, although they didn't tell us everything. I thought it was just a large



room or a couple of out of the way classrooms or something. Even using time compression, what the girls managed to do's pretty brilliant."

"You mean to say the others were not with you?"

"They came later," Harry said. "When Neville and I were first shown this place, it was just with Hermione and Ginny. The time compression activated once the main doors closed behind us and we spent thirty days with them. And yes, we did more than just sleep with them. During that thirty days, we spent most of our time learning Occulmency, physical training downstairs, and once we learned Ginny's wand was a very good match for Neville, we worked on Transfiguration. Oh, and we also worked on getting Neville's greenhouse up and running."

"And it was during this time that you decided to start a family?"

"Er - well the girls had already decided that before we were even brought here. We were not told of that plan until later. Once Hermione and Ginny knew they were pregnant, they told us everything, including why they were doing it and that we needed the others as well. Needless to say, I wasn't terribly happy with the idea at first, but we were arguably past the point of no return.

"Once we had been through thirty days, the time compression deactivated for a brief time. Hermione and Ginny left us and we were joined by Hannah and Susan. We continued our training with them. Katie and Lisa joined us next. We were now far enough along that the mentoring in Occulmency was not so necessary although Neville and I kept up with the practice. We were also through the end of Fourth Year in Transfiguration. Our training was now in Charms and Ancient Runes, the latter of which Neville was taking but I was not. We continued that training with Padma and Parvati. Then we were joined by Marcia and Andrea and with them we began studying Defense and Arithmancy, the latter of which neither Neville or I was taking. That training continued with Luna and Laura. I guess we should have guessed what was coming next, but we didn't. Once our time with Luna and Laura was up, the Slytherins arrived. First it was Tracy and Rosie and then Daphne and Lucinda. With them, we studied hexes and curses and basic dueling and Potions. When their time was up, Gabrielle and Michelle arrived. Neville and I continued working on all the stuff we had been doing

and those girls taught us - or at least began to teach us French and Italian and a lot about magical culture, healing and stuff."

"And at the end of it, all of these young women were pregnant?" Dumbledore asked.

"Yes sir, they were."

"I don't see how this helps you with the next task at all," Dumbledore said out loud, although Harry and many of the others suspected the man knew exactly what had occurred.

"You cannot obviously believe this farce," Professor Snape said. "Even assuming this is true, there is no way their so called marriages can be legal."

Dumbledore sighed. "I regret, Severus, if the conditions are met - and it appears they have been - these marriages are both legal and unassailable even by me. They've somehow evaded anything I or anyone else could do. Their certificates appear totally valid. The certificates cite to provisions of the Marriage Code I cannot refute either as Headmaster or as Chief Warlock.

"Section 14 of the Marriage Code allows minors to legally consent to a marriage without either permission from or notice to their parents or guardians provided the girl is pregnant and the boy acknowledges paternity. It also is predicated upon the fact that there is no real question of paternity as the girl has never been with another boy in such a manner. Section 16 means the marriage was validated and completed by magical contract at Grigotts. Those two provisions have been verified and are unassailable by anyone. Section 26 means the marriage was also by prior betrothal contract between the heads of the respective families. Section 27 states that the marriage is a Line Continuation Marriage, meaning that the wife is the last of an Ancient line and their children will continue that line without legal claim to the estate of the father. Those two sections only apply to Miss Abbot and Miss Bones, but they are valid and unassailable. Section 28 is similar, except that the children will merely inherit from their mother's estate, but can choose whether to continue that line. This section only applies to Miss Lovegood, but still it is quite valid under our law given Section 29. Section 29 states that the marriage is part of a legally valid and binding Plural Marriage. That section applies to all the young ladies as does the

last. Finally, Section 32 invalidates all pre-existing betrothal agreements. The marriages are quite legal. But it still does not explain why. I still have no idea why you needed to marry these women. Your participation in the Tournament does not provide a justification for all that seems to have transpired, Harry."

"I will admit, the tournament does not justify most of this. The South Wing and Time Compression were originally about training me up. But the marriages? No. What the tournament did, or at least what my FORCED participation in this thing did, was get Hermione thinking. And not just her. All of these lovely young ladies got to thinking. None of them believed I was in this nonsense by choice..."

"You're so like your father," Snape began. "He would have loved to have been a Champion..."

"Yet my mother would not have," Harry said. "I only look like my father and even then not so much. I have his hair, his damnable eyesight and his bone structure. I have my mother's eyes and the eyes are said to be the mirror of the soul. From what I've learned over the last year or so, my father would never have gone after Quirrell. It was neither fun, nor funny. At best, he'd have given up after meeting Fluffy because as I'm sure you're aware, that was one intimidating and not so fun dog! He became a brave man, but at age eleven if it wasn't a joke, he wanted little to do with it and going after the Stone was no joke! My Mum would have because it needed doing. My father would have hidden under a rock with the opening of the Chamber of Secrets. He was a Potter. He was a parslemouth. While he was not the Heir of Slytherin, he was from a Cadet line and that was his family's dirty little secret! Mum, on the other hand, would have been like Hermione and tried to solve the puzzle if only because it was there. My father would not have tried to save a Sirius Black. There was no fun involved and it was ruddy dangerous to confront a supposed killer. My Mum would have tried because it was an intellectual challenge and she would have rescued Sirius because it was the right thing to do, not because she stood to gain from it. My father would have jumped at the chance at being a part of this Tournament. My mother would not have under any circumstances and certainly not if she was below the age line. My father was an open show off and huge Quidditch fan, probably knew more about it than Ron who can be quite annoying about what he knows. Despite what you think, I only play Quidditch because I like to fly and am good at it. I can't tell you about any Quidditch Team or

their stats or anything because I don't know, and honestly I don't care! And I most certainly don't carry a snitch around with me! Gods, that idea seems SO annoying! My father would never conceive of being friends with any Slytherins. My mother, on the other hand, was a friend of some Slytherins. And I willingly married two lovely ones. They are brilliant and lovely young women. I'd have been a fool not too. The Sorting Hat took barely a second to sort my father into Gryffindor. It argued with me forever it seemed. It wanted me in Slytherin and, most unfortunately, I had already met Draco Malfoy and would have left Hogwarts altogether rather than be in the same House as him. The only thing I truly have in common with my father is we don't like you! Yet he didn't like you from the start. I did give you a chance and you jumped all over me for just being! What did you expect? Who am I truly more like, Snape? My father or my mother?"

Snape did not answer.

"This still does not answer my question, Harry," Dumbledore said. "Why was all of this necessary?"

"Because of you," Harry said.

A/N: ... with a bit of a cliffy...

Chp30